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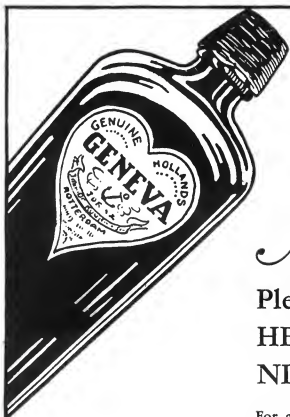
*A book-
length
novel
by*

L.G. Blochman



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**MEDICAL
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George, M.D.



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FOG OVER THE RIVER

By L. G. Blochman

From penthouse to Shantytown—Manhattan's latest murder took its devious and dangerous course.

CHAPTER I. MIDNIGHT CALL.

PHIL COLLINS glanced at the clock on the house switchboard in the lobby of the Vandoria Apartments. Five minutes before midnight. In five minutes he would be off duty.

Collins had been working for two weeks as substitute elevator opera-

tor at the Vandoria Apartments. He was not an elevator boy by trade. He was a radio repairman, but he had been ambitious. In 1929 he had opened a radio shop of his own, sinking his savings into a lease, equipment, and a modest stock. The radios that he had bought in 1929 to sell for fifty dollars were selling to-day for twelve dollars; but Collins was no longer selling them. His own stock had gone under the ham-



mer at a creditors' sale in 1931. Since then he eked out a bare living at whatever odd jobs New York could offer—sometimes at his own trade, more often at anything he could pick up at the employment agencies. His job running the Vandoria elevator had come after a lean period of nearly two months. Even it was only a temporary arrangement, although Collins hoped that it might work into something steady until things picked up again in the electrical line.

The next day was pay day, but Collins would not get anything. He

had already drawn two weeks' wages in advance. His pinched, thin face had convinced the superintendent of the building that he had not been eating regularly, and got him the advance. Most of it went to pay his back room rent, which was still more than a month in arrears. The last few days his landlady had been complaining again. Collins was wondering if he could dare ask for another advance to quiet her clamoring, when the indicator in the elevator buzzed insistently. Again Collins glanced at the clock. One minute to midnight. This would be his last trip.

He stepped into the elevator cage and closed the doors. He looked at the indicator panel. A red light glowed opposite the figure 18. He moved the control lever and the car began to mount.

The eighteenth was the penthouse floor. There were two penthouses atop the Vandoria Apartments—one on each side of the roof. The call for the elevator undoubtedly came from penthouse B. The tenants of penthouse A were quiet people and always retired early. The man in penthouse B, however, was a queer duck. William Wight was his name. The week previous, when Collins had been on the elevator for the midnight-to-noon shift, Wight had twice rung for the elevator at four in the morning, coming back at six. He was a big, powerful man with a shaggy mane of hair, snow-white in contrast to his bushy black eyebrows. He had a young face, with an aggressive, bulldog jaw. He wore thick-lensed spectacles with octagonal frames. He had a gruff, commanding voice, which Collins had heard only uttering curt, disagreeable words. He seemed, on the whole, to be a generally disagreeable as well as mysterious person, quite different from his daughter. At least Collins thought the girl in penthouse B was his daughter. He thought a good deal about the girl, in fact—too much for an impecunious, temporarily employed elevator operator to be thinking about the daughter of a man who lived in a penthouse—if she were his daughter.

THE elevator stopped at the eighteenth landing. Collins slid the doors open. He waited. No one came into the car. He stepped into the hall, looking in both directions. There was nobody

in sight. He wondered if he had read the indicator wrong. He stepped back into the elevator. Perhaps he had penthouse B on the brain. Perhaps the call had come from the seventeenth floor. He was about to drop down a floor and see, when the door of penthouse B clicked open.

Collins watched expectantly. The door swung inward very slowly, as though the person opening it were trying not to make a sound. It was fully five seconds before Collins saw that the person was not the snow-manned William Wight, as he had expected, but the dark-haired, gray-eyed girl he supposed was Wight's daughter. The girl was wearing lounging pajamas. She beckoned to Collins.

Collins crossed the hall in three strides. The girl laid her forefinger across her lips. Collins stopped.

"Will you do me a favor, Mr. Collins?" the girl asked in a whisper.

"Why, s-sure," Collins stammered. The girl knew his name. She must have inquired of the superintendent about him.

The girl drew an envelope from the ample sleeve of her pajama jacket and handed it to Collins. It bore a typewritten address to "Mrs. Harry Daggett" at a number on East Thirteenth Street.

"Would you see that this note gets to Mrs. Daggett?" she asked.

"I'll mail it right away," Collins replied.

"Don't. Don't mail it, please." The girl made a little, frightened gesture of protest. "You must give it to Mrs. Daggett personally. Don't give it to any one else. And by no means give it to her if she is not alone. Tell her it's from June. She'll understand. Don't let any one see you give it to her."

"She'll get it first thing in the

morning," said Collins, putting the letter in his pocket. "I'll do just as you say."

"You're awfully good," said the girl. She was standing against the door, holding it slightly ajar with one hand behind her. "I'm afraid I'm putting you to a lot of trouble."

"No trouble at all, Miss Wight," said Collins.

"My name's not Wight," said the girl. "It's June Lawn."

"Then you're not——"

Collins did not finish his sentence. The door behind June Lawn was pulled abruptly open. The surprised girl fell back a step, against William Wight, whose shaggy mane towered above her trim dark head.

"What do you want?" Wight barked at Collins. His powerful frame was clad in a black silk dressing gown.

"Why, nothing," said Collins, cowed by Wight's hostile glare.

"I rang for the elevator," said June Lawn quickly. "I asked this young man to leave a note for the superintendent—our electric refrigerator isn't working right."

"How often have I told you that if you want anything, you're to ask me or the housekeeper?" growled Wight, pushing the girl back into the apartment. "Go to bed."

He slammed the door.

Collins got back into the elevator. The indicator was buzzing—basement. The midnight relief man had arrived and was waiting to come on duty. Collins closed the doors. The car dropped.

IN the basement Collins turned over the elevator to his relief man and started changing his clothes. He heard the telephone bell ringing in the superintendent's basement quarters. He heard the superintendent's sleepy voice. Collins

had just removed his uniform when the superintendent shuffled out of his quarters, pulling his suspenders over a woolen undershirt.

"Evenin', Collins. Goin' home for the night?" asked the superintendent.

Silly question, thought Collins; the superintendent knew he was off duty at midnight. He said "Yes, sir."

"We owe you any money?" asked the superintendent.

"No, sir. I drew two weeks' pay in advance, you remember."

The superintendent nodded.

"Then you don't need to come back to-morrow," he said.

"You mean you're changing my day off?"

"No. You got all year off. You don't need to come back."

It took several seconds for the significance of the superintendent's words to sink in. Even then Collins wasn't sure he had heard right.

"I'm—I'm fired?" he asked.

The superintendent nodded.

"Tough luck," he said.

"But haven't I been working all right? What's the matter?"

"They've been complaints," said the superintendent.

Collins stared. Suddenly he understood. The telephone call to the superintendent a moment ago had been from William Wight. The man in penthouse B had demanded his dismissal. Wight had misinterpreted the interview he had surprised between his daughter and the elevator operator. But the girl wasn't Wight's daughter. She had said her name was June Lawn. Whoever she was, Wight was obviously objecting to her talking to Collins, objecting even to Collins being in the Vandoria Apartments.

"Did the complaint come from penthouse B?" asked Collins.

The superintendent yawned, but did not reply.

"Tough luck," he said, turning to go back to bed. "Hope you find another job. Night."

COLLINS put on his hat and went out. A cold drizzle was wetting the streets. It was late autumn. Collins pushed his hands into his pockets. His fingers touched a quarter and two nickels—his entire capital. He would walk home. It was two miles, but he was out of a job again and the subway fare would buy him a cup of coffee.

He was wet with rain by the time he reached his rooming house. The house had a chill, musty smell about it. The stairs creaked as he started to walk up. When he reached the second landing the door opened. The landlady stuck out her head. She was fat, and her yellowish-gray hair was done up in leather curlers.

"You got that back rent you owe me, Mr. Collins?" asked the landlady.

"Not yet," said Collins.

"You better get it to-morrow," said the landlady. "There's been a gentleman around wanting to rent that room o' yours. It's the only room I got vacant—since a room I don't get no rent from is the same as vacant. The gentleman is coming back to-morrow."

"I'll get you your money to-morrow," said Collins. He knew he wouldn't. He hadn't the slightest idea of where he could get any money. He continued climbing the creaky stairs.

Collins slept badly. It was not so much the knowledge that he was out of a job again that worried him. The bitter struggle of the depression years had equipped him with an uncomplaining stomach and a sort of numb resignation to unemployment.

Even the prospect of eviction with cold weather coming on did not bother him as much as the short, mysterious interlude at the door of penthouse B. What was the relation between William Wight and June Lawn? Why had Wight wanted Collins dismissed from the Vandoria Apartments? What was the nature of the letter that June Lawn had given him to deliver to Mrs. Harry Daggett in person and alone—and to the obvious ignorance of William Wight, since the girl had concealed the true reason for her ringing for the elevator?

The mystery of the letter was in some prospect of being cleared up, for Collins got up early to perform the mission with which June Lawn had charged him.

He walked to the East Side address typewritten on the envelope. He found the house in a row of brick tenements in a street noisy with children and bedecked with laundry drying on fire escapes. He went up the stoop and tried to push by a man standing in the doorway, but the man stopped him.

"Who do you want?" asked the man. He was slim, in his late thirties, and dapper with a kind of threadbare elegance. He wore a fuzzy fedora hat that had once been black, but was beginning to take on a greenish tinge with age. The nap on the velvet collar of his coat was worn smooth. Moth-eaten spats covered some of the shortcomings of his pointed black shoes.

"I'm looking for Mrs. Harry Daggett," said Collins.

The man in the black fedora did not remove the arm which blocked the entrance. He coolly looked Collins up and down.

"Mrs. Daggett's not here," he said after a moment.

"When will she be back?"

"Can't say. What do you want with her?"

"I've got a message for her," said Collins.

"You can leave it with me," said the man. "I'll see her when she comes in."

Collins shook his head.

"It's personal," he said.

"Who's it from?"

"None of your business," said Collins.

"None of your cheek," countered the man. "I'm a friend of Mrs. Daggett's. I'm trying to do her a favor."

"So am I," said Collins. "I'll be back later."

"Make it to-night," said the man. "About nine."

Collins went away. He spent the rest of the day looking for a new job. For an hour he moved among the little crowd of dejected-looking men whose hopeless eyes scanned the placards in front of the employment agencies in the shadow of the Sixth Avenue "L." He answered a dozen "wanted" calls. Eleven of them were already filled when he arrived. The twelfth man wouldn't take him because he wasn't married and had no dependents. At the end of the day he went back to his rooming house to rest his tired feet. The landlady wouldn't let him in.

"The gentleman came back," she said. "I rented him your room. You're more than a month behind."

"Give me my suitcase then," said Collins.

"I'll give it to you when you pay me the back rent you owe me."

When Collins had gone, the landlady suddenly remembered that a telegram had come for him that afternoon. It was upstairs in her room. Stupid of her to have forgotten it, as there might have been a telegraphic money order in it. She would go up and see.

The landlady ripped open the yellow envelope addressed to Collins. She breathed a heavy sigh of disgust. It was not money. It was from a girl. It read

MUST SEE YOU TO-NIGHT STOP
COME PENTHOUSE BETWEEN TEN
AND ELEVEN WITHOUT FAIL STOP
EXTREMELY URGENT

JUNE LAWN

Ah, these modern girls! The landlady sighed. The terrible importance they put upon a date with their boy friends. And the terrible boldness with which they told their boy friends how much they wanted to see them. Things had been different when she was a girl.

The landlady tore up the telegram with a feeling of great self-righteousness.

CHAPTER II. SHANTYTOWN

COLLINS walked to the East Side again to try to find Mrs. Harry Daggett. He got inside the house this time. The hall was redolent with the odors of cooking cabbage. Collins knocked at a door at the end of the hall. The slim man with the black fedora opened the door.

"She came in, but she went out again," said the man.

"Did you tell her I was looking for her?" Collins asked.

The man nodded.

"Maybe that's why she went out again," he said.

Collins turned and walked away. The man came out, closed the door behind him, and followed. He caught up with Collins as he was leaving the stoop.

"I'll walk a' ways with you," he said. "Which way are you bound?"

"I don't know," said Collins.

"Where do you live?"

"No place."

"Sleep in the subway, I suppose?" said the man.

"I was thinking of it," said Collins, "but I think I'd rather save the nickel to eat with. I guess I'll go up to the municipal flop house for the night."

"Don't!" exclaimed the man in a horrified voice.

"It's getting too cold to sleep on a park bench," said Collins. "I may as well get a free bed from the city."

"Don't, boy!" repeated the man. "You look like a pretty good sort. Don't start living in flop houses and bread lines. They'll break your spirit. Keep your independence, boy! I'll show you where you can sleep and you won't be under obligations to nobody."

Collins looked at the man suspiciously.

"Are you Harry Daggett?" he asked.

"Good gosh and seven fishes, no!" declared the other with vehemence. "My name's Hartford."

"Why don't you want me to see Mrs. Daggett?"

Hartford laughed.

"Why don't you want to tell me what you want to see her about?" he countered.

Collins was nonplused. He wished that he knew the background of this mission he had undertaken so readily for the girl in penthouse B.

"I ain't in the habit of telling my business to strangers," he said.

Hartford gave him a friendly pat on the back as the two men walked down the street.

"O. K., boy," he said, "but I hope you ain't too proud to accept a stranger's hospitality—such as it is."

"Thanks," said Collins. "What are you offering?"

"Nothing much," said Hartford. "But it'll keep you out of the cold.

We're coming to it, just ahead; East River Shantytown."

Directly in front of the men the street ran out on a short pier where two squat tugs were tied up. The wind blew from the East River with the cold smell of the tides. To the right a sweeping curve of lights outlined the span of Williamsburg Bridge.

"Turn in here," said Hartford.

A hole had rusted through the corrugated iron fence surrounding an abandoned brickyard, near the head of the pier. Collins hesitated. Then he stepped through the rusted fence. After all, he had nothing to lose. He might as well spend the night here.

ON the site of the old brickyard, extending for more than a hundred feet along the river bank, was a motley collection of makeshift dwellings. Some of the huts were neatly built of scrap lumber, roofed with flattened-out oil cans, weather-boarded with strips of worn linoleum. Others seemed to have been thrown together from the materials of a junk pile, without effort at adornment. Some were mere packing cases, patched against the elements with torn bits of tar paper. All of them were inhabited by men, who, despite the fact that they had been swept from the normal course of life by the current of the world economic crisis, still had courage written on their rugged faces. Enabled to preserve some semblance of self-respect by the independent, if somewhat precarious existence of this shantytown colony, they had not the defeated, whipped-dog expression of the men Collins had seen standing about the doors of employment agencies.

"I'll introduce you to some of the boys," said Hartford to Collins, "although it ain't strictly necessary.

Names don't count here. We never ask anybody his name, and half the men don't bother to give them. You'll have to meet Mayor Mike, though."

"Mayor" Mike lived in one of the better-built shanties. He was a husky, grizzled man of about fifty, with a full, weather-beaten face covered with a gray stubble. He seemed more relaxed, better fed than the other men of East River Shantytown.

"This boy is moving in with me, Mayor," said Hartford, as he presented Phil Collins.

Mayor Mike looked at the newcomer with keen, but not unkindly blue eyes.

"I'll talk to him, Handsome," said Mayor Mike. "Disappear."

"Handsome" Hartford withdrew from the shack, leaving Collins alone with Mayor Mike. Mayor Mike did not talk at once. First he took a stick from a pile of driftwood stacked in one corner of the single room, and put it into a rusty iron stove that appeared to have been rescued from some junk heap. Then he took a corn cob pipe from the pocket of his blue flannel shirt, filled and lighted it with great deliberation. At last he motioned Collins to the only chair in the room. The chair had only three sound legs. The fourth had been improvised from a barrel stave and a length of wire. Mayor Mike himself sat down on the bed—a spring mattress resting on the floor.

"Like to work, kid?" he asked finally.

"I've always worked when I could get a job," said Collins.

Mayor Mike nodded.

"I don't mind that," he said. "Never work myself. Interferes with proper enjoyment of leisure. I'm tolerant though. Not like Hand-

some Hartford. Handsome an old friend of yours?"

"Not very," said Collins.

"Handsome kind of looks down on people that work," Mayor Mike continued. "Thinks it's degradin'. He talks. Sells people things they don't want—gadgets for takin' spots outa clothes, and rheumatism cures, and things like that. But only when he has to. You partners with Handsome in this new racket o' his?"

"No," said Collins. Then he added: "That is, not exactly."

He hoped he might find out something about this Handsome Hartford who seemed to have constituted himself an obstacle to Collins delivering June Lawn's letter to Mrs. Harry Daggett. Collins felt reasonably sure that the chief reason for Hartford's bringing him to Shantytown was to keep him away from Mrs. Daggett.

LAST few days," said Mayor Mike, "Handsome Hartford's been out peddlin' dinky little lace handkerchiefs on Fourteenth Street. I don't know where he gets 'em or who buys 'em. Women, I s'pose. He says he gets two-bits a crack for 'em, and that they're worth a dollar. Mebbe. All I know is that Handsome still seems just as broke as ever. I dunno what he does with the money. Ever been in jail, kid?"

"Never," said Collins.

Mayor Mike rubbed his pipe against his nose reflectively.

"It ain't no disgrace, necessarily. I been in jail in seventeen different States. Nothin' serious. Vagrancy. Hard to keep from gettin' vagged now and then. Always got floaters, though. 'Thirty days,' the judge says next morning. 'Sentence suspended on condition you leave town in twenty-four hours.' I leave. That's why the boys here call me

'Mayor.' I lived in jungles like this or worse all my life. These is normal times for me. It's new to the rest of 'em. They kind of count on me for advice."

Mayor Mike stopped talking. He turned down an oil lamp which had begun to smoke, making a streak of smudge on a picture of Abraham Lincoln, cut from the rotogravure section of a newspaper and pasted on the in-sloping wall of the shack. Then the mayor of Shantytown stuck his head out the door and yelled for Handsome Hartford.

"Handsome," said Mayor Mike, when Hartford appeared, stooping slightly to enter the lopsided doorway, "as mayor of this shantytown, my main duty is to keep it from bein' wiped out by the cops. You and this kid up to any skulduggery?"

"Not in the least," said Handsome Hartford.

"What about them lace doohinkuses you been peddlin' these days? Did you come by 'em honest, or did you swipe 'em some place?"

Hartford brushed an imaginary fleck of dust from the sleeve of his coat and rearranged the imitation pearl stick pin in his cravat before he replied.

"Mayor," he said at last, "you and me never discussed ethics before, so I'd like you to clear up a small point before I answer. Do you or do you not consider taking advantage of a low-down, dirty crook to be stealing?"

Mayor Mike puffed on his pipe.

"Seems to me," he said, "that cheatin' a crook comes under the head o' legitimate business."

"Then my lace handkerchiefs are honestly come by," said Hartford promptly.

Mayor Mike nodded.

"I guess the kid can stay with us," he said.

So Phil Collins went to sleep in Handsome Hartford's shack that night. It was a small, cockeyed shack scarcely larger than the mildewed mattress that almost covered the floor. From nails driven into the walls of bare boards dangled a sparse-bristled whisk broom and a battery of empty clothes hangers. Hartford carefully hung up his coat and folded his trousers before donning a patched pair of overalls in which he was to sleep. His overcoat he used as a supplementary covering to the single blanket which he shared with Phil Collins.

COLLINS, worn out by a day of walking to the ends of the city in search of jobs which did not exist, fell asleep almost immediately. Hartford did not. Hartford lay awake for a long time, until he was sure that Collins was deep in the unconsciousness of first slumber. Then he jostled the youth with his elbow. Collins did not awaken. Hartford sat up. He leaned over Collins, going through his pockets with quick, deft fingers. When he found what he was seeking, he got up, slipped on his shoes and left the shack. He walked toward the river. Not far from the bank, two men were sitting in front of a fire burning in a five-gallon oil can with the top cut off. Hartford knew the men only by the names of "Walrus," a leather-necked man with a drooping gray mustache, and "Red," who lived in the upturned automobile body and drank canned heat.

Standing a moment by the light of the fire, Hartford examined the envelope he had taken from the sleeping Collins, noting with satisfaction the typewritten address: "Mrs. Harry Daggett." He inserted the point of a pencil under one corner of the flap, and with a gentle rolling

motion of the pencil, pried it open without tearing the paper. He moved a few steps away from the fire and turned his back to Red and Walrus. He took the letter out of the envelope. A folded bank note fell at his feet. He picked it up quickly. It was a ten-dollar bill. He put the money in his pocket. Then he read the letter:

Dearest Isabel:

I am still convinced that the inclosed money could be put to no better use than ridding the world of your utterly worthless husband. From what I know of him, I am sure that there are men who would be glad to exterminate him for half the price. However, I am a sentimentalist at heart, and since I have long ago given up trying to put any sense into your head, I can at least put milk into the baby's bottle.

There was no signature.

Hartford refolded the letter and put it back into the envelope. He kept the money in his pocket. He walked to the shanty occupied by a skinny, beady-eyed man known as "Slats," an unemployed carpenter, who was responsible for much of the linoleum-and-barrel-stave architecture of East River Shantytown. Slats gave Hartford a little glue with which to stick down the flap of the envelope he had opened. Then Hartford went back to his shack.

Phil Collins was still sleeping soundly. Hartford slipped the rifled envelope back into the pocket from which he had taken it. Collins stirred slightly, but did not awaken.

CHAPTER III.

A BLACK DOG HOWLS.

AT seven o'clock of the following evening, East River Shantytown was in the throes of a crisis. Mayor Mike was being called upon to make the most difficult decision in his long career as Solomon

of the unemployed. Municipal policy was being fixed.

"It's only for a few days, Mayor," argued Handsome Hartford. He was sitting on the Mayor's bed. The Mayor himself was ponderously pacing the creaky floor—three paces in each direction—and puffing furiously at his corn-cob pipe. In Mayor Mike's only chair sat a young woman. She had curly brown hair and gray eyes that were a little dreamy, a little incomprehending. In her lap a six-month-old baby was sleeping.

"There ain't no precedent for it, Handsome," said Mayor Mike. "There ain't never been any women in Shantytown."

"She's in trouble," countered Hartford. "Why shouldn't a woman in trouble be just as welcome here as a man in trouble?"

Mayor Mike passed a puzzled hand over the gray stubble on his chin.

"Where's she been livin', Handsome?" he asked.

"Over in East Thirteenth Street."

"And why can't she go on there?"

"She's got to hide out for a little while, Mayor. It might be a matter of life and death."

"What'd she do?"

"Nothing," said Hartford, "but there's certain parties who might want to use pretty harsh methods to keep her from telling some of the things she knows."

"How long you been takin' care of her, Handsome?"

"We've been friends for a good many years," said Hartford. "We used to live in the same little town in Indiana. We went to Sunday school together——"

Mayor Mike laughed long and heartily. The thought of Handsome Hartford going to Sunday school seemed to strike him particularly funny. Suddenly he grew solemn.

"The kid yours?" he asked.

"No," said Hartford. "We're just friends. She's got a husband."

"Where is he?"

"Last we heard, he was in jail," said Hartford.

Mayor Mike knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"But you been sellin' those lace doohinkuses to feed the kid, ain't you?" he asked.

Hartford nodded.

"And you expect the two of 'em to sleep in that combination sieve and water cooler you live in?" demanded Mayor Mike.

"For a few days——"

"Nope," Mayor Mike shook his head. "Ain't good enough. The kid'd freeze. No stove. This place here'd be better. I could move in with Slat, temporarily."

"Mayor, you're a prince."

Mayor Mike held up his hand.

"It ain't settled yet," he warned. "On a serious matter o' municipal policy like this, I got to call in some o' the boys. Round 'em up, Handsome."

A moment later four of the leading citizens of East River Shantytown crowded into Mayor Mike's shack. They were Slat, the carpenter; Walrus, the mustachioed waterfront roustabout; Red, the canned-beat addict who lived in an abandoned auto body; and a man named "Spig," who wore a blue-and-white striped jersey, a black beret, and dark sideburns. The men stood silently gazing at the sleeping baby in the woman's lap, while Mayor Mike explained the situation.

"Handsome thinks we ought to take 'em in for a few days," concluded the Mayor. "What's your gents' opinion?"

No one spoke. The baby woke up and cried a little. Its mother spoke to it in unintelligible maternal syl-

lables. The baby stopped and started sucking its thumb. The men seemed embarrassed.

"You got to remember," said Mayor Mike, "that a kid like that can't eat fish chowder and stale bread all the time, like us."

"I'll take care of feeding it," said Handsome Hartford.

Walrus took a timid step forward and bent over to examine the baby. The baby smiled, took its thumb from its mouth, and reached out to pull Walrus's left mustache. Walrus blushed under his weather-tanned skin. The other men laughed.

"Kind of a cute little tike," said Walrus.

"What's her name?" asked Slat.

"Harry," said the baby's mother. "She's a he."

"What's your gents' opinion?" asked Mayor Mike again.

"I don't see no reason why they can't move in," said Walrus, "if they don't mind the company."

"Sure," echoed Slat.

"How about you, Red?" asked Mayor Mike.

Red shifted his weight from one gaping shoe to the other.

"O. K. by me," he said.

"Spig?"

The man with the beret and sideburns shrugged his shoulders.

"Guess it's all right," he said.

So East River Shantytown's first woman was admitted to residence, with no further identification than that her baby's name was Harry.

IT was after ten o'clock and the new residents were asleep in Mayor Mike's shanty when Phil Collins returned to the river colony in the deserted brickyard. He was again worn out from having walked the streets all day in a fruitless search for a job, from having once

more tried in vain to deliver June Lawn's message to Mrs. Harry Daggett. He found Handsome Hartford reading a magazine in his shanty, by the light of a brass kerosene head lamp that had once graced a 1905 automobile.

"Howdy," said Hartford. "I thought maybe you weren't coming back."

"I brought something to eat," said Collins. "Sort of a rent payment. A fat lady proprietor of a kosher delicatessen down the street let me wash dishes and sweep out the place in return for some food. I had her give me something I could share. It ought to be fine for a hungry man. It'll spoil your appetite and you can't eat much."

He held out a paper bag.

"What is it?" Handsome Hartford sniffed suspiciously.

"Pickled herring," said Collins.

"Good gosh and seven fishes!" Hartford exclaimed. "That's about all we eat around here—fish! Walrus used to work down at the Fulton Street docks and has a lot of friends in the wholesale fish market. He goes down three-four times a week and brings back enough for Spig to cook a community chowder for all Shantytown."

"She gave me a loaf of rye bread, too," said Collins.

"Slat's has a friend on a bakery wagon who donates us all his stale bread," said Hartford. "If you like stale bread—"

"Sorry," said Collins. "Maybe I should have brought caviar."

"Don't throw the herrings away," said Hartford. "Somebody can use them."

"Too bad they aren't red herrings," said Collins. "You might use them yourself—to drag across the trail of Mrs. Harry Daggett. Where you hiding her?"

"Tell me who gave you the message for her, and I'll tell you where she is," Hartford replied.

"That's still none of your business," said Collins.

Hartford shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"Suit yourself," he said, putting down his magazine and blowing out the lamp. "Good night. Sleep well."

Collins didn't sleep well. Despite his fatigue, he dozed only by fits and starts. A cold fog had crept up from the lower harbor, blanketing East River like a chill premonition of disaster. The moisture dripped from the patched roofs of Shantytown, steadily, relentlessly. The damp cold seeped into Collins's very bones. He started, half awake, at every noise, and the night was full of noises. Tugboats hooted mournfully as they groped their way up and down the fog-bound river. A thin wail, like the cry of a baby, penetrated Collins's sleep at intervals. Toward dawn the baying of a dog supplanted the infant's bawling. It was a persistent, unpleasant howl, as though the dog were complaining of death. It appeared to come from near by, too, probably within the confines of Shantytown. Collins wanted to get up and throw a rock at the dog, but he was unable to shake off the grip of a druglike sleep which was neither slumber nor complete wakefulness. Then a woman screamed—almost in his ear, Collins thought—and he sat upright, his nerves tingling.

BY the gray half-light of a foggy dawn, Collins saw that he was alone in the shack. He had not heard Hartford go out. He got up and peered out the door. He saw a young woman running up from the river bank toward Mayor Mike's shack.

She was bareheaded. Her curly brown hair streamed behind her head as she ran. There was terror in her gray eyes.

Handsome Hartford was running after her, loudly calling "Isabel! Isabel!"

Collins was struck by a strange sense of familiarity about the young woman's features. At first he thought he knew her. Then, as she and Hartford disappeared behind Mayor Mike's shanty, Collins knew why he had a feeling of recognition. She reminded him strongly of June Lawn. Something about her was like the girl in penthouse B. The eyes, perhaps. Even the expression of terror was not unlike the expression he had seen flicker for a moment in the eyes of June Lawn when William Wight had suddenly pulled open the penthouse door behind her, three nights ago.

Collins saw Mayor Mike ambling down toward the river bank—rapidly, for a man of the Mayor's usual slow, deliberate movements. Other residents of Shantytown were piling out at the woman's scream. Walrus, a black woolen watch cap pulled down over his ears, was running. Spig was crawling out of the piano box. Red was already at the water's edge.

Collins put on his shoes. He heard the chimes of the Metropolitan tower, a mile away, pealing clearly on the moisture-laden air. Five o'clock. He, too, started for the river.

The white phantom of a Sound steamer moved slowly through the fog, obliterating for a moment the ghostly silhouettes of factory chimneys on the Long Island shore opposite.

The dog was still howling. Collins could see it now. It was a little bow-legged cocker spaniel. It

sat, shivering with cold at the water's edge, its pointed nose lifted in lugubrious complaint, its long ears hanging disconsolately. Its curly black coat was soaked. Red tried to drive the dog away, but it came back and resumed its howling. Red gave up and joined the group of which Mayor Mike was the center.

The group of Shantytown denizens was standing at the far side of the abandoned brickyard, almost against the pilings of the short pier. They were looking at something under the pier. As Collins came up he saw what they were watching. The white flanks of a small boat shone through the murk under the pier. The tide was just beginning to ebb, and the current of the river, forced back for four hours by the salt flood from the sea, was again asserting itself. Swirling eddies from the conflicting currents were swinging the boat around, knocking it against the black pilings. It was a twenty-foot launch with a small cabin forward. Painted on the bow in gleaming red letters was the name: *Laughing Girl*.

Walrus, his long mustache beaded with fog, waded into the river up to his knees and seized a line at the bow of the *Laughing Girl*. He tugged. The launch slid slowly out from under the pier, the water lapping against the bow. As the nose grounded, Phil Collins was seized with a cold feeling of nausea. The *Laughing Girl's* cargo was not a pretty sight.

In the cockpit of the launch a man lay. The man's face was a waxen mask—a pallid mask of ineffectual weakness, frozen forever into a pitifully twisted, silly smile. There was blood in the cockpit where the man was lying. The back of his head had been blown neatly away.

"Go for the cops, Red," said Mayor

Mike, without taking his eyes from the cockpit of the *Laughing Girl*.

The black cocker spaniel continued to howl.

CHAPTER IV.

HARTFORD'S WARNING.

A FEW seconds after the policeman on the beat had telephoned headquarters, ambulance bells were clanging and police sirens were shrieking through the early-morning calm of streets leading to the East River. A crowd of half-clad, morbidly curious neighbors flocked to Shantytown. Three dirty urchins lay on their stomachs at the edge of the pier, looking down at the dead man in the launch. The inhabitants of Shantytown itself stood at the water's edge, talking in awed tones.

Just as the scream of the police sirens first became audible, Phil Collins, who was standing at the back of the group, felt his elbow shaken from behind. He turned to look into the drawn, worried face of Handsome Hartford. With a nod of his head, Hartford motioned him aside. Collins came.

"You better get rid of that letter," said Hartford in an undertone.

"What letter?" asked Collins.

"You've got a letter in your coat pocket for a Mrs. Harry Daggett."

"What of it?"

"Tear it up. Burn it. Anything. But quick!" urged Hartford. "The dead man in the launch is Harry Daggett."

Collins looked blankly at Hartford for several seconds. Then he asked: "Was that young woman who ran past here a minute ago—the one you were calling Isabel—was that Mrs. Daggett?"

Hartford nodded.

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"Where'd she go?"

"Never mind. Get rid of the letter."

"I'll take it to Mrs. Daggett," said Collins. "I promised I would."

"Don't be a fool!" said Hartford. "You stay clear of this—"

But Collins had already started away with rapid strides.

Passing Mayor Mike's shack, Collins heard a baby crying. He looked in. He saw a baby lying on the bed, but no one else was around. He passed the shack and headed toward the hole in the rusty corrugated iron fence that was the gate to East River Shantytown. As he stepped through the hole, a green police car pulled up at the curb. A uniformed officer and a corpulent, bull-necked plain-clothes man got out. The plain-clothes man grabbed Collins's arm as he passed.

"What's the hurry?" he demanded.

"Going to get some breakfast," said Collins.

"Later," said the plain-clothes man, without releasing his hold on Collins's arm.

"I've got a date," said Collins.

"You've got a date with Lieutenant Vincent Hoag of the homicide squad," said the plain-clothes man. "Nobody leaves this place until I've had a chance to talk to 'em all. Come on."

He pushed Collins back through the hole in the fence.

Other police cars were arriving, more policemen were piling out. Two white-coated internes took a stretcher out of an ambulance. An assistant medical examiner got out of his auto, carrying a black bag.

Lieutenant Hoag said to a uniformed policeman: "Search this man."

The policeman went through Collins's pockets.

"No gun," he announced. "Just

some employment agency slips and a letter."

"What's his name?"

"What's yer name, Mac?"

"Phil Collins."

"Give me the letter," said Lieutenant Hoag. He put it into his own pocket.

Approaching the river, Hoag let go of Collins's arm, but Collins made no effort to get away. It was too late now. Shantytown was swarming with blue uniforms. There were policemen everywhere, on the pier, at the fence—pushing back the little crowd near the launch, keeping people from leaving the confines of the old brickyard.

HOAG and the medical examiner were on the deck of the *Laughing Girl*, bending over the corpse. Hoag raised his head.

"Who's head man of this bums' camp?" he asked of the little group standing on the shore.

Mayor Mike stepped forward.

"I'm what you might call the guidin' star o' this self-respectin' colony o' unemployed," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"What's the dead man's name?"

Mayor Mike shook his head.

"Even when live men come to Shantytown, we never ask no names," he said. "So when they're dead when they come—" He shrugged.

"We'll find out sooner or later who he is," said Lieutenant Hoag. He had been searching in vain for papers or signs of identification on the body. "You may as well spill it now."

"He don't live here," said Mayor Mike.

"Never saw him before, I suppose."

"Never," said Mayor Mike, starting to fill his corncob pipe.

"Of course," said Lieutenant Hoag. "The corpse just arrived from Europe in this here boat, with his head already blown half off, so there's no use asking any of you bums if you ever saw the bird before because—"

There was no word from the silent group of Shantytown residents. Phil Collins looked instinctively for Handsome Hartford. Hartford was nowhere to be seen.

"That launch don't belong here neither," Walrus volunteered. "I never see no *Laughing Girl* tied up to this pier in the ten months I been living here."

"Seen it anywhere else, though?" asked Lieutenant Hoag.

"I maybe seen it around the river when I was working down at the Fulton markets," admitted Walrus, "but I don't specially remember."

"About what time did the launch come in to this pier?" asked the lieutenant. "Anybody hear the engine?"

"I didn't hear no engine," said Mayor Mike.

"Neither did I," said Walrus. "She probably drifted up from downtown a ways. The tide was runnin' in since midnight."

Lieutenant Hoag turned to the assistant medical examiner.

"How long's the man been dead, doc?" he asked.

"About two hours," came the reply. "Seems to have been killed by a large-gauge shotgun. I may be able to tell you more after the autopsy."

"Any of you bums hear a shot at three o'clock this morning?" asked Lieutenant Hoag, looking at Mayor Mike.

Mayor Mike glared back at the police lieutenant, puffing furiously on his pipe.

"Wasn't none," he announced. "I'd 'a' heard it. I sleep light."

"The guy must 'a' been shot before the launch drifted up here," volunteered Walrus. "I didn't hear no shot, neither."

AT this point three men pushed their way through the crowd. Two of them carried cameras. The third was a brash-looking, youngish man with baggy trousers showing through the flapping front of his raincoat, and a shapeless felt hat pushed back from his head at an impudent angle.

"Hold it, Vincent!" called the young man with the baggy trousers, as he jumped to the deck of the *Laughing Girl*. "Look intelligent, and maybe you'll get your picture in the *Daily Tabloid*. 'Action photo of Lieutenant Hoag Solving East River Murder.' Who's the stiff, Vincent?"

"Jim North, get the hell off this boat!" ordered Hoag. "Swell chance my finger-print man'll have of finding anything after a dumb newspaper reporter's been tramping all over the place with his muddy shoes."

"Vincent, you surprise me!" said North. "Even a policeman ought to know that there's no prints to be made off anything as wet as this boat. Who found the body? Not a pretty girl with photogenic legs?"

"If you'd keep your mouth shut and your ears open, North, you might find out something," declared Hoag testily. "I ain't finished questioning these bums yet."

"Hard to say just who did find the body," volunteered Mayor Mike. "I guess I got here as soon as anybody. Me and Red got here about the same time."

"What called your attention to it?"

"The dog howlin', I guess," said Mayor Mike.

"What dog?"

"A black spaniel. He don't belong

in Shantytown. There he is, settin' on the edge of the pier."

Mayor Mike pointed with the stem of his pipe.

Lieutenant Hoag shouted to a uniformed policeman standing on the pier.

"Catch that black dog, O'Brien."

As Officer O'Brien started to obey, the dog scurried away from his grasp with the speed of a scared rabbit. Officer O'Brien, in hot pursuit, was a poor second as the black cocker spaniel streaked off the pier and down the street, its tail between its legs, long ears flapping.

"It'll probably come back," said Hoag, as he watched the dog and policeman disappear. "If the dog belongs to the dead man, it'll come back when we move the body. How long had the dog been howling?"

No one replied.

"I'm talking to you with the red hair," said Lieutenant Hoag.

"Me?" said Red. "I didn't hear the pooch at first. It was the lady screaming that woke me up."

"What lady?"

"We ain't sure it was a lady," said Mayor Mike quickly. "It might 'a' been most anybody. A man."

"Or a seagull," said the Walrus.

HOAG called to an officer who had been searching the huts of Shantytown.

"Find any signs of a woman living in those shacks, sergeant?"

"No women," the sergeant called back from the door of Mayor Mike's shanty, "but there's a baby in here."

"The hell you say!" Lieutenant Hoag exclaimed. He stepped off the *Laughing Girl* and walked quickly up the river bank. The crowd followed him to Mayor Mike's shanty. The baby was lying on Mayor Mike's bed, very busy trying to put his foot in his mouth. It be-

stowed a two-tooth smile on the lieutenant of the homicide squad.

"Who's kid is this?" demanded Hoag.

"Mine," said Mayor Mike.

"Nerts!" said Hoag, looking Mayor Mike up and down.

"Any reason why it couldn't be?" said Mayor Mike with a hurt expression.

"Don't tell me you're the kid's mother, too," said Hoag.

"His mother ran away with a tight-rope walker," said Mayor Mike.

"When was this?" asked the lieutenant.

Mayor Mike rubbed the stubble on his chin. He might have been trying to remember, or he might have been puzzling over the unfamiliar task of trying to estimate a baby's age.

"About a year ago," he ventured.

"That kid ain't more than six-months old," declared Hoag.

"I know," said Mayor Mike. "She ran away before the kid was born. Brought him back to me in a basket."

"Left him on your doorstep, I suppose?" said Hoag.

"Ain't no doorstep to this house," replied Mayor Mike contemptuously. "By the way, Red, get some canned heat outa that limousine palace o' yours. Time to warm up the baby's milk."

"Make it snappy," said Lieutenant Hoag, "because I'm taking the red-head to headquarters for questioning. You, too, papa," he said, poking his finger into Mayor Mike's stomach. "And that young squirt that was trying to get away to keep a date for breakfast. What's your name again?"

"Collins," came the reply from the doorway.

"You'll come along, too," said Lieutenant Hoag. "I want to talk to you."

Outside, the white-coated internes

were carrying the corpse off the *Laughing Girl* in a stretcher. As they crossed the abandoned brickyard, the little black cocker spaniel came back through the hole in the fence, sniffed at the stretcher, sniffed at the heels of the internes.

Jim North, police reporter for the *Daily Tabloid*, stepping out of Mayor Mike's shack, paused in the midst of lighting a cigarette to watch the dog. If he expected the dog to follow the body of the murdered man, he was disappointed. While the stretcher bearers were disappearing through the fence with their gruesome burden, the little spaniel ran down to the water's edge, sprang aboard the *Laughing Girl*, ran to the cabin, and curled up contentedly on a leather cushion.

Jim North finished lighting his cigarette and snapped out the match. He went through the hole in the fence and walked a block to a corner grocery store that was just opening for the day.

"Gimme a package of dog biscuits," he told the clerk. "Quick."

CHAPTER V.

"FINGER PRINTS CAN'T LIE!"

PHIL COLLINS sat in Lieutenant Hoag's office at police headquarters, perspiring profusely. For more than an hour the two-hundred-pound police official had been firing questions at him without let-up. The other men from East River Shantytown had been released after questioning, but Collins had been detained. Hoag asked him the same questions over and over, always coming back to the same points, trying to pick a flaw in his story. There were homicidal phrases in that letter addressed to Mrs. Harry Daggett, found in Collins's possession.

"Who is Mrs. Harry Daggett?" Hoag asked for the twentieth time.

"I never saw her, I told you," said Collins. "I don't know."

"Then what were you doing with this letter?"

"I'm supposed to deliver it to Mrs. Daggett, but I don't know her."

"Why didn't you deliver it, then?"

"I couldn't find her at that address," said Collins. "I guess you've found out by now that she isn't there."

"Who wrote the letter?" demanded Hoag.

"I don't know," said Collins truthfully.

"You wrote it yourself," said Hoag.

"Why don't you compare my handwriting?" suggested Collins.

"Smart, aren't you?" said Hoag. "Trying to make me believe you don't know the letter's typewritten. Don't forget we got ways of tracing typewriting."

"Why not compare my signature, then?" asked Collins.

"As if you didn't know the letter wasn't signed."

Collins mopped his brow. He was greatly relieved to learn that the letter was typewritten and unsigned. He could go on keeping June Lawn's name out of this business, without fear of being tripped up. He wasn't sure what sinister connection this letter had with the murder of Harry Daggett in an East River launch, but he felt he was doing the right thing in protecting June Lawn. He might be involving himself, but that made little difference, since he was innocent of any part in the proceedings. He was foolish, perhaps, in going to such lengths on behalf of a girl he hardly knew, a girl with whom he had had only one real conversation.

"I've told you all I know," said Collins.

"What sort of a man was this bird that gave you the letter to deliver?" Hoag came back to an old question.

"I told you I didn't notice. I think he was kind of fat and wore glasses." This was a detail invented by Collins in his first effort to protect the girl.

"And how did he happen to pick you for a messenger?" asked Hoag. "I don't notice you wearing a uniform?"

"I was standing in front of an employment agency in Sixth Avenue," said Collins, sticking to his story, "and this man asked me if I wanted to earn a few cents. He gave me a dollar, told me to take a taxi and keep the change."

"What did you do with the dollar?"

"I used it to eat with."

"But you didn't deliver the letter?"

"I tried," said Collins. "And I'll try again. After all, I took the dollar."

"Where did you say was the last place you worked?"

"A delicatessen on East Ninth Street, near Avenue C," said Collins. He had not mentioned the Vandoria Apartments, on account of penthouse B.

Lieutenant Hoag took a typewritten letter and envelope out of a drawer in his desk. It was not the original letter addressed to Mrs. Harry Daggett—he was keeping the original in order to be able to trace the typewriter if the need developed—but it was a copy. He handed the letter to Collins.

"All right, Collins," he said. "Here's your letter. Go on out and earn that dollar you spent."

Collins put the letter into the envelope.

"You mean I can go?"

"Get out," said Hoag.

Collins wasted no time. When the door closed behind him, Lieutenant Hoag pushed a buzzer. A detective came into the room.

"Burke," said the lieutenant, "that bird that just left here is Phil Collins. Monday is waiting in the corridor to shadow him. You might saunter along to relieve Monday if anything comes up. Call me back every hour."

THE detective left. Lieutenant Hoag picked up a sheaf of papers—some finger-print cards and a report from the identification bureau. A door slammed. Lieutenant Hoag looked up scowling, profanity ready on his lips. He looked down again without swearing. Jim North, the *Daily Tabloid* police reporter, had just made his usual unceremonious entrance.

"Well, Vincent," said North. "Solved the Shantytown murder mystery yet?"

"Have you?" growled Hoag, without looking up. He was always a trifle annoyed by the brazen, wise-cracking North.

North had an uncanny knowledge of the underworld and a remarkable flare for the solution of crime. He took an unholly delight in outsleuthing a police sleuth.

"I warn you, Vincent," said North, "that the mystery will have to be cleared up by the end of the week. That's an ultimatum."

Unabashed by Hoag's ignoring him, he drew up a chair, sat down, and planted his feet on the lieutenant's desk.

"Whose ultimatum?" demanded Hoag, looking up at last.

"Mine," said North. "I'm going on my vacation at the end of the week. Taking it late this year. And I can't afford to run out on a front-page mystery, with nobody here to

solve it but you, Vincent. Any developments?"

"We identified the body," said Lieutenant Hoag. "It's Frank Monzello."

"Monzello? You mean one of those four fish market racketeers indicted by the grand jury?"

"That's the man," said Hoag. "He got out on bail last night and this morning we find him dead."

"It ain't Monzello," said North.

"Must be," said Hoag. "The identification bureau made finger prints of the corpse up at the morgue. Monzello was just printed here day before yesterday, and the card hadn't even been filed yet. The prints tally."

"Must be some mistake," said North, frowning.

"Can't be," said Hoag, glad to contradict the reporter. "The court bailiff and the jailer who let Monzello out of the Tombs last night were up at the morgue, too. They identified the body."

"You ever seen Monzello before you saw the corpse?" asked North.

"No," admitted Lieutenant Hoag. "Monzello never gave us no trouble. He wasn't a big shot in the fish market racket."

"Not very, he wasn't," said North. "He's the brains of the racket. He'd have owned the Seafood Wholesalers Mutual Association in another six months if the district attorney hadn't decided to clean up Fulton Street. Even so, I bet he has a new association going in a month or two. I talked to him once. He's a bright boy, Vincent."

"I don't see it takes no brains to shake down fish dealers," protested Hoag. "All he has to do is tell them to join the Seafood Wholesalers Mutual at so much per annum, and those that don't, get kerosene poured over their fish so they can't sell 'em.

Some get their teeth knocked out. Anyhow, Monzello's dead."

"Half a million a year isn't a bad little racket, Vincent," said North, "and anyhow, Monzello's not dead."

"Finger prints can't lie," said Hoag.

"All right, you work on your theory, and I'll work on mine," said North. "Find out anything about the *Laughing Girl*?"

"What d'ye think I been doing all morning—sitting here blowing bubbles?" demanded Hoag.

"Where's the boat now?"

"Down at the Battery," said Hoag, "tied up at the harbor police station. We traced her registry. She belongs to a fellow named Arthur Bendick over on Long Island."

"Who's Bendick?" asked North.

"I got a man over on Long Island now, talking to him," said the lieutenant.

"Otherwise no clews?"

"Just this," said Hoag. He opened the deep bottom drawer of his desk and produced a battered, water-soaked derby hat. "One of the boys found it floating under the pier near Shantytown, where we found the *Laughing Girl*."

NORTH took the hat and began examining it.

"Belong to the dead man?" he asked.

"Too big," said Hoag. "That's what the medical examiner says. The dead man's head wasn't in no condition for a fitting."

North turned out the sweatband. There were no initials, but something had been written on the underside of the leather with an indelible pencil. The water had made it into an almost illegible purple blur. North squinted at it.

"What's this?" he said. "Looks like a telephone number."

"It is," said Hoag. "Avenue 9-3902."

"Which is what?"

"Vandoria Apartments. Pretty swank place."

"What's the connection?"

"None yet," said Lieutenant Hoag. "I'm working on that angle, but I don't think it's hot. Some swell at the Vandoria probably threw the hat away and some bum from East River Shantytown fished it out of an ash can. I don't think it's a clew."

"Don't try to think, Vincent," said North. "It's not becoming to your style of beauty."

"As a matter of fact, I don't think Shantytown is mixed in this murder at all," continued Hoag. "I've turned loose all the bums I brought in from there. Still watching 'em, of course, but my idea is that the real digging is around the Fulton Street fish markets. I think it's just an accident that the body was found in a boat off Shantytown."

"I don't," said North. "The *Laughing Girl* was anchored, wasn't she?"

"Sure," said the lieutenant. "Under the pier. Just a way to hide it and delay discovery of the body."

"Don't talk like a policeman, Vincent," said North. "If the murderer wanted to hide the body, he'd have dumped it overboard, or opened the seacock and sunk the launch with the body in the cabin. Take it from James that the *Laughing Girl* was anchored off Shantytown as an example and a warning."

"Warning to whom?" asked Hoag.

"That's to be seen," replied North.

"If——"

Lieutenant Hoag's telephone rang. He lifted the receiver.

"Hello. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . The hell you say! . . . Well, bring him in and I'll—— What? . . . All right, then I'll come over."

Hoag replaced the receiver and stood up. North took his heels from the desk and stood up, too.

"Well?" asked North.

"Long Island," said Lieutenant Hoag. "Something phony about this man Bendick that owns the *Laughing Girl*. I'm going to talk to him."

"So am I," said North, helping himself to a cigar from a box on Hoag's desk before he followed the lieutenant from the room.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAUGHING GIRL.

YOU ought to diet, Vincent," said Jim North, squeezed in the back seat of a police car between the beefy lieutenant and a detective only a few pounds less corpulent.

The car sped across the Williamsburg Bridge, snaked through the drab, forlorn streets which creep back from the Long Island shore of East River, and finally drew up at the end of a blind alley in the fringes of Long Island City.

Across the end of the alley was a wooden gate, topped by a semicircular sign which read:

ARTHUR BENDICK
Ship Chandler Mechanic
Nets Repaired

From the gate a path led down to the river. On one side of the path was a boathouse. On the other side was a small cottage, badly in need of paint. A sepia fish net was spread along a little porch at the side of the cottage. Red drums of gasoline were piled against the boathouse.

Lieutenant Hoag, Jim North, and the detective got out of the police car. Two men were waiting at the gate. One was obviously a plain-clothes man. The other was a man

in the early thirties, wiry, wearing a greasy leather windbreaker. His face was tanned, with high cheek bones and a pointed jaw. He stood with his hands in his pockets, watching with keen eyes as the newcomers approached.

"Here he is, lieutenant," said the plain-clothes man. "You take him. He's got me batty. Anyhow, you'll want to look around the place."

The man in the leather windbreaker took one hand from his pocket and extended it solemnly to Lieutenant Hoag.

"I am Arthur Bendick," he said in a high, squeaky voice. "Can I offer you a small drink of applejack? It is good on a raw day like to-day."

"No, thanks," said Hoag. He did not shake hands with Bendick but walked past him down the path. Then he stopped suddenly, turned in his tracks. "You own the launch *Laughing Girl*?"

Bendick did not reply at once. He was busy tamping tobacco into an old pipe.

"Sure, I own the *Laughing Girl*," he said at last.

"Did you use it last night?" demanded Lieutenant Hoag.

"No," said Bendick.

"Who had your launch between midnight and five this morning?" the lieutenant asked.

"Nobody," squeaked Bendick. "She was right here all the time."

Lieutenant Hoag smiled incredulously.

"Happen to know where the *Laughing Girl* is now?" he inquired.

"Sure. She's right in the boathouse where she's been for two days."

Hoag's incredulous smile broke into a laugh.

"Like hell she is," he exclaimed. "She's down at the Battery in custody of the harbor police."

Bendick shook his head.
"No," he said solemnly. "She's here. Come on, I show you."

BENDICK led the way to the end of the path and turned into the little boathouse. There, resting on the gently inclined rails on which it had been slid up from the water, was a craft that to all appearances was the one in which the body of a murdered man had been found off Shantytown that morning. It was a twenty-foot launch with a small cabin forward. Across its square stern and along its white flanks near the bow, gleaming red letters proclaimed: *Laughing Girl*.

Lieutenant Hoag blinked. He turned to Jim North.

"Am I cockeyed?" he demanded, "or——"

"Probably, Vincent," said North, "but I'd call the harbor police anyhow."

"I hauled her up outa the water day before yesterday," Bendick was explaining shrilly. "Rudder been acting funny. Long as I had her out, I thought I'd touch up a few spots with red lead, and——"

"Got a phone in there, Bendick?" interrupted Lieutenant Hoag.

"Phone? Sure," said Bendick. "In the house. I show you."

He led the way into the cottage. A peculiar frowzy smell, in which were blended the odors of creosote and stale bacon grease, permeated the dark interior of the house. While Hoag was telephoning, Jim North poked around among the jumbled coils of rope, anchors, red and green running lights, and other nautical impedimenta which lay about in disorderly profusion.

"This is Hoag, homicide squad," said the lieutenant into the telephone. "Where's the *Laughing Girl*?

. . . Yes, I know you had her tied up, but that was a couple of hours ago. Have another look, will you? . . . What? . . . Maybe she can't run off by herself, but—the engine's out of commission? Well, will you take a look anyhow, as a special favor?" There was a pause. Then: "Hello. . . . She is, eh? . . . All right, thanks."

Hoag hung up and turned puzzled eyes on Jim North.

"The *Laughing Girl* is still at the Battery," he said.

"No, no," protested Bendick in his high voice. "She's been in the boat-house since day before yesterday when——"

"All right, all right," broke in Hoag. "Is there another launch called *Laughing Girl* in New York harbor?"

Bendick smoked solemnly for a moment. Then he shook his head. "Never saw her, if there is," he said. "Is there another registered?"

"The only *Laughing Girl* registered is owned by Arthur Bendick."

"That's me," squeaked Bendick.

"What do you use the launch for?" asked Hoag.

"Business," replied Bendick. "I make deliveries. Gasoline. Canvas. Ropes. I fix nets——"

"You sell to the fishing fleet?"

"Sure," said Bendick. "Good customers."

"You're around the Fulton Street docks quite a bit then?"

"Sure. Fulton docks. Peck Slip."

"Know a man named Frank Monzello?"

"Monzello? What schooner?"

"No schooner," said Hoag. "He's in the Fulton market."

Bendick shook his head.

"Don't know him," he said. "Fish marketers ain't my customers. Only fish catchers."

"Never heard of Monzello?"

"No," said Bendick. "What kind of fish he buy? Cod? Mackerel? Shad?"

"Suckers," volunteered Jim North.

"Get out of here, North," Hoag ordered. "And let me talk to this man."

North grinned and left the cottage. Ten minutes later, when Lieutenant Hoag and Bendick came out, North was standing by the back door.

"Hey, Bendick," North called. "Where's your dog?"

"Dog?" squeaked Bendick. "What dog?"

"You got a pan of water and a plate of scraps put out by the back door," said North. "What are they for if they ain't for your dog?"

"For my cat," said Bendick. "They're for Madam Pompano."

"Where is the cat?" asked North.

"Gone," said Bendick. "She went away yesterday. Another honeymoon, I think. She always comes back."

"I got an idea we'll come back, too, Bendick," said Hoag. "Come on, North. Riding with me?"

"Sure," said North. "You taking Bendick back with us?"

"What for?" asked Hoag. "He's in the clear so far. I'm leaving a couple of the boys here to see what they can dig up. They'll watch him."

Hoag said nothing during the first part of the journey home. Not until the police car was moving up the long approach to the Williamsburg Bridge, bound for Manhattan, did he break his puzzled silence.

"North," he asked, "what the hell do you make of those two launches with the same name, same design, same engine?"

"I make just one thing," said North.

"What's that?"

"I make a bet with you that the dead man ain't Frank Monzello," said North. "A box of cigars."

"I'll take you," said Hoag.

"A full box," said North. "And perfectos. None of those dinky panetelas you gave me after we found the Elwell emeralds that time. I want to smoke 'em on my vacation next week."

CHAPTER VII.

PENTHOUSE B.

PHIL COLLINS knew he was being followed. He had no illusions about being so readily released by the police. He was not particularly bothered on his own account, since he had nothing to hide. He did, however, want to see June Lawn and report to her the events of the past forty-eight hours. She would certainly want to know what had happened, since the note she had given him to deliver had expressed very definite ideas on riding the world of Harry Daggett—ideas which some one had evidently carried out, if Handsome Hartford was telling the truth when he said that the dead man in the launch was Daggett. Thus Collins was faced with the problem of losing his shadows before reporting to penthouse B. He felt that it wouldn't be advisable to lead the police back to the Vandoria.

After leaving police headquarters, Collins went back to Mrs. Harry Daggett's address in East Thirteenth Street. He knew she would not be there, but it seemed the proper thing to do, in view of his story to Lieutenant Hoag. After that, he went to Shantytown.

Two uniformed policemen were sauntering about Shantytown now, watching Spig stir the community fish chowder. In Mayor Mike's shack there was a conference of

Shantytown elders over methods of making the baby stop crying. The infant was lying on Mayor Mike's bed, giving shrill, full-lunged expression to its unhappiness.

"Didja feel was there any pins stickin' him?" asked Walrus, stroking his mustache.

"Nothin' wrong with him, but he's hungry," diagnosed Mayor Mike with an air of authority. "You gents didn't feed him like I said while I was out with the cops. Warm up the milk, Red."

"Ain't no room on the stove," protested Red. "Spig's cookin' chowder."

"You go get that canned heat," ordered Mayor Mike. "A couple drinks less ain't goin' to hurt you. When it's gone, I'll appropriate some money outa that ten bucks Handsome Hartford left with me to get some more."

"Where is Handsome, anyhow?" asked Phil Collins.

"Gone on a business trip," said Mayor Mike. "He'll be back."

"The brat's just yellin' for its ma," suggested Slats. "Right idea, too. Can't expect a bunch of men to play nursemaid to——"

"We're goin' to take care o' this kid till his ma comes back to get him," said Mayor Mike. "That's settled. You go ahead makin' that cracker box into a cradle like I told you, Slats."

Phil Collins went out again. It was getting dark. He saw the man he recognized as the detective assigned to trail him, loitering on the pier. He ate some of Spig's fish chowder and some stale bread. Then he started off for the Vandoria. As he went through the hole in the fence, he saw the man on the pier turn and saunter quite casually after him.

Collins walked rapidly westward

across town. He knew without looking behind him that he was being followed. He had an idea for shaking off the shadow. It would cost him one-third of his entire capital—which was now fifteen cents.

He went down the steps of the East Side subway station in Astor Place and dropped one of his three nickels in the turnstile. He took an uptown local and noted that the detective took the same train, one car to the rear. The detective stood on the platform so that he could look into Collins's car.

AT Grand Central most of the passengers in the local got out. A crowd stood about the doors, struggling to get in before the doorways were quite clear of outgoing passengers. An express roared into the station. More passengers crossed the platform to change to the local. When the confusion was at its height, Collins suddenly left his seat, darted to the door, tried half-heartedly to press through the charging phalanx of incoming passengers. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the detective come to life in the next car and step off the train, watching. Collins allowed himself to be pushed back into the car by the shuffling, shoving crowd. The car doors slid closed. The detective strolled by on the platform, with a professional look of unconcern which did not conceal the fact that he was searching the subway crowds for his man. Collins stepped behind a stout woman with her arms full of bundles. The uptown local moved out of the station. Collins had very successfully lost his shadow.

At the next station he got off. He bounded up the cement stairway to the street. He looked about him, on the chance that by some miracle the

detective had managed to commandeer surface transportation which would beat the subway to the station. There was no one in sight. He was free. He walked rapidly down the block and turned in to a drug store. He stepped into a telephone booth and dropped his next-to-last nickel into the instrument. He called Avenue 9-3902. He held his breath as he listened to the buzzing sound of the operator trying to complete the call.

"Vandoria Apartments."

Collins did not recognize the man's voice. It must be the new man, the man who had taken his place.

"Penthouse B, please," he said.

"Sorry. No one in penthouse B," said the voice.

"But Mr. Wight must be there," said Collins. "He's expecting my call."

"Mr. Wight went out about ten minutes ago," said the voice.

Collins smiled into the mouthpiece. Here was a piece of welcome information and a lucky break.

"Then I'll speak to Miss Lawn," said Collins.

"Sorry," replied the voice. "Mr. Wight asked that no calls be put through to penthouse B during his absence," said the man at the switchboard.

Collins hung up. He went to the entrance of the drug store and looked in both directions. There were two women walking up from the subway station. No one else in sight. Collins started for the Vandoria.

As he walked along the street, he wondered if he should walk boldly into the lobby, taking a chance that the man on duty at the switchboard and elevator was new and would not recognize him. If Wight had left word that no telephone calls were

to be put through to penthouse B, however, it was certain that no visitors were to be taken up in the elevator. Collins would have to walk the seventeen flights of stairs. As he came to the Vandoria's marquee, extending out over the sidewalk, Collins slowed his steps, hesitated, then turned and strolled into the familiar lobby.

The man at the switchboard had his back turned. As Collins came in, he faced about. He was a new man.

"I've got a message for Reed, Apartment 2-F," said Collins. He remembered the names of the tenants.

The new operator looked at Collins disdainfully, then nodded toward the stairway.

"Second floor right," he said. "Walk it."

COLLINS wanted nothing better. He went up the steps two at a time, passing the second floor, then the third, fourth, fifth. At the sixth floor he slackened his pace. He had a long climb ahead of him. By the fifteenth he was well winded and weak at the knees. As he paused for breath, he heard the elevator mounting from below. Climbing another half flight, he stopped on the mid-floor landing, out of sight of the corridor. He listened.

The elevator continued to mount, closer, higher. The car was even with him, passed him. Was it William Wight returning already to penthouse B? The elevator climbed another floor, stopped at seventeen. The doors opened and closed. The elevator started down again. Collins drew a deep breath and resumed his climb. A moment later he was knocking on the door of mysterious penthouse B.

There was no response to his knock. He knocked again, repeatedly. Still no response. He thought he heard some one moving inside, however. He put his lips close to the door and called: "Miss Lawn?"

"Who is it?" replied a girl's voice.

"This is Phil Collins. I've something important to tell you."

"I can't see you," said the girl through the door. "I'm locked in." "Locked in?"

"Mr. Wight locked the door on the outside when he went out."

"I'll see you on the terrace in three minutes then," said Collins promptly.

"Don't make any noise," said the girl's voice. "Don't wake up the housekeeper."

Collins went to the end of the short corridor and opened a door into a closet. Inside the closet was a ladder that led to the water tanks on the common roof of the two pent-houses. He climbed the ladder, opened an overhead trapdoor, and emerged on the roof. He gasped as the cold night wind struck him full in the face.

He tiptoed across the roof of pent-house B. Between the shadowy towers of other apartment houses, he could see even rows of street lamps far below. Ahead was Central Park, with luminous serpents of automobile lights crawling along the winding roads. He slid over the edge of the roof and let himself down to the broad terrace among wicker furniture in a sky garden of potted plants. He did not see June Lawn at first. There was no light but a rosy glow filtering through heavily draped French windows. Then he caught sight of her, sitting in a deep arm-chair, between two bay trees. She did not get up. He stood a minute, looking at her in the half darkness, wondering how to begin.

"You're two days late," she said.

"Late?"

"Why didn't you come when you got my telegram?"

"I didn't get it," said Collins.

"Where did you send it?"

The girl laughed—half in embarrassment.

"I got your address from the superintendent," she said.

Collins's answering laugh was a little bitter.

"I don't live there any more," he said. "I've been evicted."

"Then how did you happen to come here if you didn't—"

"I wanted to tell you that I could not deliver the note you gave me," said Collins. "And that—well, there has been trouble. But I guess you have heard."

The girl stood up.

"What's happened?" she asked quickly. "I haven't heard. What's happened to Isabel?"

"As far as I know, nothin's happened to Mrs. Daggett," said Collins. "But I guess you get your wish about her husband."

"What wish are you talking about?"

"Didn't you wish that the world could be rid of Harry Daggett?" asked Collins.

There was a moment of icy silence. Then June Lawn said slowly in cold, hurt tones:

"I thought I could trust you. I suppose it serves me right for relying on my instincts. I didn't really think you would open a letter confided to you for private delivery when—"

"I didn't!" Collins broke in. "The police opened it and read it to me."

"The police?"

"Harry Daggett was murdered sometime last night. His body was found in a launch anchored off East River Shantytown."

JUNE LAWN dropped into her chair. There was another pause. Then she said in a low voice:

"I really don't know what to say—what my own feelings are. I can't sincerely say I'm sorry, because Harry Daggett was of no use to any one—not even himself. Still, when a person I know dies—even a worthless person—it does something to me, makes me feel very small, very unimportant. Who—how was he murdered?"

Collins shook his head.

"All I know is that the back of his head was blown off," he said. "They have had me at police headquarters most of the day, trying to find some connection between your letter that they found on me, and the murder. Of course they don't know that the letter came from you. I don't think they've identified the body as Harry Daggett's, either, or the police would have locked me up."

"I'm sorry," said the girl. "I didn't want you to get involved in anything like this. I expected to tell you something about that letter the other night, but Mr. Wight came out and stopped me. Then, when Isabel telephoned me next day, I was frantic. I was afraid you might walk blindly into some terrible situation, on my account. I wanted to warn you. When I heard that Mr. Wight was going to be gone between ten and eleven, I managed to send you a telegram."

"Is Mrs. Daggett some relation of yours?"

"She's my sister."

"And what relation is William Wight?"

"No relation," replied the girl. "He's my boss, that's all. I'm just his stenographer."

"Is it usual for a stenographer to be living in her boss's penthouse?" asked Collins.

"There's nothing usual about Mr. Wight," said the girl. "The whole situation is very unusual and very mysterious. Particularly the last few days. I've been wishing for some way to get out of it. I'm afraid it's too late now."

"How did you get in in the first place?"

"I answered an advertisement in the newspapers," said June Lawn. "It was about six months ago. I'd just come to New York to be with Isabel when her baby was born. You see, Isabel and I used to live together in a little town in Indiana. Isabel was always a strange girl—a little naïve, a little foolish, perhaps, with a genius for collecting peculiar friends. I told her not to marry Harry Daggett, but there was no stopping her. Harry was as good-looking as he was stupid and weak. He took her to New York. They were on the verge of starvation a year later when I came on after them, and a little bewildered——"

"So you helped feed them?" asked Collins.

The girl nodded.

"I got this job with Mr. Wight, which paid quite well. I'd been working for him several months, when he asked me to come to live in the penthouse. It would be quite proper, he said, since the housekeeper also lived here. It was just that his business hours were irregular; he was apt to be getting long-distance phone calls late at night, for instance, and he wanted his secretary to be on hand for emergencies."

"What is his business, anyhow?"

"I—I'm not sure," said June Lawn. "He owns several loft buildings in Greene Street—that I know. And he has customers calling or writing in for goods. I don't know what kind of goods. The letters he dictates are very vague. 'So many par-

cels of grade A, or grade B of such-and-such size.' I've never dared ask him. He's been very good——"

"In what way?"

"Well, when he found out I was helping my sister and her baby because Harry Daggett was earning almost no money—and what little he did earn I suspect was not quite honest—he took Harry's address and got a job for him. The next thing I knew Harry was in jail. After that Mr. Wight wouldn't have anything to do with him and even refused to let me see my sister any more. That was the reason I wanted you to smuggle that note to her the other night. I asked you to give it to her alone because there was money in it."

"There was no money in it," said Collins. "I saw the police open it. I didn't see any money."

"I'm sure I put a ten-dollar bill in the envelope," said June Lawn. "Anyhow, I was afraid that if Harry Daggett knew about the money, it wouldn't do the baby any good. Harry got a few hundred dollars out of the job that Mr. Wight arranged for him, and he spent it all in a week. He bought a case of champagne, because he'd always heard about it and never tasted any. He bought a gold watch——"

"What was he in jail for?" asked Collins.

"I don't know," said the girl. "Even Isabel wasn't sure. She's never interested in practical details of that sort. All I know is that Isabel called up again the morning after I gave you the letter for her, to say that Harry had been arrested again. Mr. Wight overheard me talking on the phone. He was furious, since he'd told me to have nothing more to do with her. That's when he gave orders for no more phone calls to be put through except when he's here.

And when he's not here, I'm a prisoner. He locks the doors——"

"And you stand for it?"

"I don't know what to do. I don't know any one in New York."

"You know me," said Collins, "I'll admit that at this moment I'm not much better than nothing, but I'm going to help you get out of here. I've got a hunch that old man Wight knows something about the murder of Harry Daggett."

"He's been like a crazy man these last few days," said the girl. "He acts as if he were afraid of something. I don't dare to breathe except when he's away—and that isn't often."

"When will he come back tonight?" asked Collins.

"He didn't say."

"Listen," said Collins, stepping closer to her, "if anything should happen, you can find me in Shantytown, over on the East River. Your sister's baby's there."

"For Heaven's sake!" The girl stood up. "Who's taking care of the baby?"

"Do you know a man named Hartford?" asked Collins.

"Charlie Hartford? Another one of Isabel's strange friends. He's from our home town. He wanted to marry Isabel for years. At that, he would have been better than Harry Daggett. Anything—any one would be better than——"

The girl stopped abruptly. Collins saw a look of terror come into her eyes. He followed her gaze. A shadow had blotted out the rosy glow filtering through the draped French windows leading to the terrace.

"He's come back!" whispered June Lawn. "He's——"

Phil Collins stepped behind the trim row of potted bay trees.

The French windows were flung

suddenly open. Light streamed out upon the terrace from the drawing-room of the penthouse.

CHAPTER VIII. THE TREMBLING HAND.

THE hulking form of William Wight loomed in the doorway. The light shining from behind him made a luminous, horned crown of his shaggy, snowy mane, leaving his face a dark blur. His hands were in his pockets.

June Lawn took a step toward him.

"Good evening, Mr. Wight." Her voice was thin and unsteady.

"You were talking to some one," boomed Wight.

"I was singing to myself," said the girl. "I came out to look at the stars. I was feeling happy——"

"You were talking to some one," repeated Wight in his commanding bass. "I heard a man's voice. Where is he?"

"You must have been mistaken, Mr. Wight. I——"

The girl stopped. Wight withdrew one hand from his pocket. Light flashed on metal.

The girl took a step backward. She was standing between Wight and the trees that hid Collins.

Collins looked back over his shoulder. He was only a few feet from the parapet of the penthouse terrace, a few feet from a sheer drop of eighteen stories. The fire escape was at the other side of the terrace. Wight stood between him and the fire escape, between him and the penthouse roof and the trapdoor to the corridor, between him and the French windows leading to the interior of the penthouse. He was cornered.

"The doors were locked," boomed Wight. "Anybody who came in dur-

ing my absence is an intruder. I have a perfect right to shoot a burglar in defense of my home."

"Put that gun away, Mr. Wight," said June Lawn. Her voice was calm again, and several tones lower.

Wight lunged forward, took her arm in his powerful grasp, flung her toward the French windows.

"Get in there," he ordered. "Telephone for the police."

Collins watched through the leafy screen of bay trees. He saw the girl stumble and recover herself in the doorway. He saw her hesitate. He saw the pistol gleaming in Wight's fist. Then he noticed that the pistol hand was trembling.

He stepped out suddenly from behind the trees.

"Evening, Mr. Wight," he said.

Wight did not move. The pistol in his hand shifted a fraction of an inch to bear upon Collins. The hand still shook.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Wight.

Collins leaned forward to rest his hands on the back of a wicker chair. How much could he count on an unsteady hand at such close range?

"I came to see you about a job, Mr. Wight," he said.

"You've got no business here!" barked Wight. "You're an intruder. The law gives a man the right to kill an intruder in his home."

"Since you had me fired from the Vandoria, Mr. Wight," continued Collins in the same quiet vein, "I thought that perhaps you might square matters by getting me another job—like the one you got for Harry Daggett."

A roaring blast of flame spurted briefly from Wight's gun. A spray of bay leaves, clipped by the bullet, stung Collins's face. His hands closed on the wicker chair, whisked it from the floor, swung it.

He heard Wight's gun skating across the concrete floor of the terrace. Wight fell back under the impact of the chair.

Collins dropped the chair, sprang across the terrace and jumped for the eaves. He pulled himself up, started running across the penthouse roof toward the water tanks. When he reached the trapdoor that led down into the corridor of the eighteenth floor, he dropped to his knees and groped for the ring in the trapdoor. He found the ring, tugged. The door stuck. He got to his feet, tugged again, harder, desperately. No use. The door did not yield. Some one had hooked it from below.

COLLINS made his way back toward the edge of the roof. He might go across to the other side, drop to the terrace of penthouse A, and go down the fire escape on that side of the building. He had a feeling of guilt, however, at abandoning June Lawn. Logically, he knew, he would be in a far better position to help her if he got away from the Vandoria and maintained his freedom long enough to clear up something of the mystery of William Wight, who had tried to shoot him at the mention of the name of the murdered Harry Daggett. Yet the thought that the girl was in danger drew him toward the terrace of penthouse B. He paused at the edge of the roof, the cold wind in his face. He had a moment of dizziness as he caught sight of people walking in the street far below. Then he heard snatches of conversation. He heard June Lawn's voice raised in excited protest. He heard another woman—the housekeeper, probably—saying something. He heard William Wight's impressive bass command the housekeeper.

COM—3A

"Give her a sedative, Mrs. Grant. Hypodermic, if it's necessary. A prowler broke into the apartment and frightened her into hysterics. I've sent for the police."

Collins dropped over the edge of the roof to the terrace belonging to penthouse B.

A complaining cry from June Lawn was cut short by the slamming of a door.

Collins was groping over the concrete floor of the terrace. He found the gun that he had knicked from Wight's hand. He marched through the open French windows into an atmosphere of thick rugs and shaded lamps. William Wight had just taken a telephone receiver off the hook.

"Put that down!" ordered Collins.

Wight turned his condescending gaze on Collins, noted the gun in his hand, but made no move to comply.

"Put up your hands!" Collins ordered.

Slowly, with insolent deliberation, Wight obeyed.

"Now tell your housekeeper to bring Miss Lawn in here," said Collins.

Wight's bushy eyebrows raised a trifle in disdain. He shook his head in the negative.

"Do as I say!" ordered Collins.

"Why?" asked Wight with simulated boredom.

"I've got a perfect argument in my right hand."

"You wouldn't shoot me," said Wight. "I've phoned for the police. They'll be here at any minute. You'd be arrested for murder."

Collins crossed the room, closer to Wight, closer to the foyer and the door that opened into the corridor opposite the elevator.

"My arrest wouldn't bring you back to life," said Collins.

Wight yawned. He lowered one

hand to cover his mouth politely. As he did so Collins realized that Wight's great show of unconcern was acting—and not very good acting, either. The man's face was ashen, and the hand trembled in front of his mouth. He was going through with his bluff, however.

"Then shoot!" said Wight.

Collins hesitated. He brought his gun hand slightly away from his body as if preparing to fire—though he knew he would not press the trigger. His gaze met Wight's piercing eyes.

A door opened behind him.

Wight dropped his hands, stood up.

Collins whirled. He caught a glimpse of a dark uniform, felt a stunning blow on his head. He had a second of aching blindness, but he kept his feet. He found himself grappling with the man in uniform—the new elevator operator. Over his shoulder, through the open door, he saw the elevator standing at the eighteenth floor.

Collins squirmed from the clinch, aimed a straight left at the elevator man's head. The man ducked, clinched again, forced Collins against the wall. He saw Wight rushing toward him, swinging a bottle.

With his elbows Collins made space for infighting, then uncoiled a short upward jab. The elevator man's head snapped back. His hold relaxed. Collins pushed him into the charging Wight, turned, fled through the open door, crossed the corridor, stepped into the waiting elevator.

Collins touched the control lever, slid the doors closed.

As the car started to drop, he had a momentary feeling of relief. Then new doubts seized him. His escape was by no means final. Wight had

phoned for the police. He had an even chance of stepping out of the elevator on the ground floor into the arms of an officer of the radio patrol, sent to the Vandoria by wireless instructions from headquarters. Even if the police had not yet arrived, there was the superintendent. Wight had only to pick up his telephone to warn the superintendent that Collins was in the elevator. The car flashed downward past floor after floor.

Collins pulled back the control lever. The elevator stopped at the seventh floor. He left it standing there with the doors open, and ran down the corridor. There was a window at the end of the corridor. Collins opened it and stepped out on the platform of a fire escape. He looked down. The crisscrossing iron stairway faded in darkness.

Collins started climbing down.

CHAPTER IX.

FINGER PRINTS DO LIE.

JIM NORTH told Lieutenant Hoag that he was going back to the *Daily Tabloid* office, but he didn't go. North almost never went near his office, except on pay days. He was not one of these word-painting reporters with literary ambitions and daily by-lines over palpitating descriptions of how the victim's mother wept in court. North's job was to dig up facts. He wrote by telephone. He let the rewrite desk in the office worry about adjectives and split infinitives.

When North got out of Hoag's car after the return from Bendick's boat-house on Long Island, he hailed a taxi and drove to Center Street police headquarters by a roundabout route. Then he went directly to the identification bureau, hoping that he would get there before Hoag. Hoag,

of course, would find out eventually what North was after, but the reporter couldn't resist the chance to score a beat, not only for the *Tabloid* over the other newspapers, who would get their information from official sources, but over the lieutenant himself. There was that box of cigars to think of.

North walked into the bureau, tossing greetings left and right. He knew the whole personnel of the bureau, from photographers to finger-print experts. They looked on North as almost a member of the force.

North walked between row after row of filing cabinets, containing the finger prints of hundreds of thousands of criminals, so ingeniously catalogued that the telegraphing of a classification—a number in the form of a fraction—from Paris or Peru or Peoria, would enable the staff to determine in a few seconds whether the man in question was known to the New York police.

North stopped in front of the desk of the official he was seeking.

"Howdy, Hewett," said North. "Did Lieutenant Hoag ask for a check on the record of a man named Arthur Bendick?"

"He did," said Hewett, putting down a magnifying glass, "but he hasn't sent in for it yet."

"But Bendick has a record?"

"Sure," said Hewett. "Assault and battery. Beat up some guy down at the Fulton Street fish markets about six weeks ago. Got thirty days for it."

"Fine," said North. "You printed him, of course?"

"Sure," said Hewett.

"Let's see the card," said North.

Hewett fished among some papers in a wire basket and drew out the finger-print classification card of Arthur Bendick. North studied it a

moment. A frown creased his forehead as he looked at the two rows of black smudges and the pawlike print of the whole hand below. He glanced at the classification fraction at the top of the card and broke into a broad grin.

"Hewett," he asked, "have you filed the prints of Frank Monzello, the fish-market racketeer, yet?"

"The one that was murdered?"

"The one that Hoag says was murdered."

"He was just indicted a couple of days ago," said Hewett. "The boys here are about a week behind in their filing."

"And now that Hoag says he's dead, you probably won't ever file Monzello's prints?"

"Maybe not. We're crowded for space."

North burst into a loud guffaw.

"Then you'll never know about the miracle, Hewett, unless I tell you," said North, still laughing.

"What the hell you laughing at, North?" demanded Hewett.

"In all the thousands of finger prints you've handled," said North, his laughter subsiding briefly, "did you ever see two alike?"

"Impossible," said Hewett. "No two prints are ever alike."

"That's the miracle," said North. "If you'd filed Frank Monzello's prints, you'd have found them identical with Arthur Bendick's here."

"That's no miracle," said Hewett. "It would just mean that Monzello and Bendick were the same man."

"But they're not the same man," said North. "The prints you've identified with Monzello tally with the one's you made from the fingers of the dead man in the morgue to-day—right?"

"Wait a minute," said the fingerprint expert. He left his desk and came back a moment later with a

card which he compared with the card of prints labeled "Arthur Bendick."

"You're right," he said. "Whorl for whorl and loop for loop, they're the same. As I said, that can mean only one thing—that Monzello and Bendick are the same person."

"But they're not," insisted North. "Bendick is alive. I talked to him an hour ago. What's more, I'm convinced that the dead man isn't Monzello."

"Then—what the hell?" Hewett frowned and examined the finger prints through his magnifying glass. "I don't get you, North."

"You're not supposed to, Hewett," said the reporter. "The business of crime detection by deduction and other forms of cerebration is not the job of the identification bureau. For some quaint reason, it has been allotted to the homicide squad. And I'm going over to see Hoag right now, by the way. I'll take over Arthur Bendick's card to him, if you want."

"O. K.," said Hewett.

JIM NORTH slipped the record into his pocket and left the identification bureau. He did not go to Lieutenant Hoag's office, however. He had no intention of letting Hoag in on his discovery until he had done a little research on his own account. Hoag would be hopping mad, of course, when he found out North's tactics. He would threaten North with prosecution for obstruction of justice and interference with the functions of the police. He had threatened both before, but the prosecutions had never materialized. After all, North was not actually obstructing justice; he was furthering it in his own way. Hoag knew that the reporter was a valuable aid, in the end, whatever his annoying

tricks during the course of an investigation. And North always gave Hoag credit in print for crime solutions that the reporter had worked out himself.

Instead of going to Hoag's office, North went to the criminal courts building. It was late in the afternoon; none of the courts were in session, and most of the court clerks and bailiffs had gone home. However, North found an attendant who could give him access to the court records. North spent half an hour poring over the deposition of cases tried six weeks previous before he came to the page devoted to *The People vs. Arthur Bendick*. It seemed that Bendick had been arrested on a charge of assault and battery, and admitted to bail almost immediately. The required two thousand five hundred dollars for his provisional freedom was furnished by one Louis Rustaff, a bail-bond broker. Twenty-four hours later Bendick had entered a plea of guilty as charged, so that there were no witnesses called and no testimony taken. Bendick had been sentenced to thirty days in prison and had been committed at once, the record showed.

North jotted down a few notes and went out. He took a taxi and headed back across East River for that part of Long Island in which Arthur Bendick kept his launch, the *Laughing Girl*. He wanted to find out the truth of the possibility that the murdered man in the morgue might actually be Arthur Bendick, and that the man Lieutenant Hoag had questioned that afternoon was an impostor. He was still sure that neither man was Frank Monzello.

North did not go directly to Bendick's boathouse, but had the taxi turn down the street before he got to Bendick's blind alley. He would

question the neighbors. He found an old man with chin whiskers who raised rabbits in his back yard.

"Sure, I know Bendick," said the old man in reply to North's question. "Known him for nigh on to two years."

"Seen him recently?" asked North.

"Saw him this afternoon," said the old man. "Saw him talking to a lot of policemen."

"The fellow with the leather jacket and a high, squeaky voice—is that Bendick?"

"That's him," said the old man.

North nodded, and mentally crossed off one possibility. Evidently the murdered man was not Bendick.

"Has Bendick been away much in the last few months, do you know?" he asked.

The old man stroked his chin whiskers.

"Not that I recollect," he said pensively. "He goes away for a day or two at a time in that launch of his, but he don't stay long."

"Wasn't he away for a month—about six weeks ago?"

"Gosh, no," said the old man. "I been seeing him about twice a week regular for the last two months. Had to complain a lot about that dog of his worrying my rabbits."

"I didn't know Bendick had a dog," said North. "I thought he kept a cat."

"He may call it a cat," said the old man, "but it sure looks like a dog to me. Barks like a dog, too."

"Is it a cocker spaniel?" asked North.

"Maybe, if you say so," said the old man. "All I know is, I always thought it was a dog. A little black dog with long ears. Bad on rabbits, it is."

"Thanks," said North.

He took leave of the man with

chin whiskers, got back into his taxi and ordered the driver to return to Manhattan. The trail now led very clearly to Louis Rustaff, bail-bond broker.

CHAPTER X.

CIGARS FOR NORTH.

NORTH'S taxi raced through the busy thoroughfares of Manhattan until it reached a little street adjacent to courts and prison. Both sides of the street were lined with offices of petty lawyers and bail-bond brokers, in which paunchy men sat behind plate-glass windows, on day-and-night vigil, eagerly waiting, like birds of prey, to profit by the troubles of some unfortunate who had run afoul of the law. North crossed the sidewalk to a big window on which the name "Louis Rustaff" was emblazoned in gold block letters. He knew Rustaff slightly by reputation, which was about as good—or as bad—as the general run of bail-bond brokers, who, for a consideration only slightly more than the law allows, will post money with any court to allow an accused man provisional freedom.

North walked into the office. He saw Rustaff sitting with his feet on his desk. Cigar smoke arose from behind a newspaper. When North approached, Rustaff put his paper down, but kept his feet on the desk. He wore a derby hat pushed back from his round, flabby face. A heavy gold watch chain crossed his ample stomach.

"What can I do for you?" asked Rustaff, waggling his cigar to the left corner of his mouth.

"I came to ask about a client of yours," said North, making himself at home on the edge of Rustaff's desk, "a man named Arthur Bendick."

Rustaff suddenly deposited his

feet on the floor with the grace of a performing elephant. He stared at North through tiny eyes that were almost hidden in rolls of fat.

"Who are you?" he demanded through clouds of cigar smoke.

"I'm Jim North," was the reply. "Otherwise known as Sister Susie of the household hints department of that fine old family journal, the *Daily Tabloid*."

"Don't know you," said Rustaff.

"You will," said North. "Quite well, probably. I have an idea, Rustaff, that we may see quite a lot of each other during these crisp autumn days. Where did you get that hat?"

North leaned forward and unceremoniously plucked the derby from Rustaff's head, exposing a pate quite bald except for a dozen long black hairs carefully combed across the top of the glistening scalp.

"Hey, don't get familiar with that doiby," said Rustaff, making a grab for his hat. "It's a ten-dollar kelly."

North was looking at the inside of the hat. The manufacturer's trade-mark was still bright in its gilt stamp, and the leather sweatband was undarkened by perspiration.

"New, isn't it?" commented North. "You didn't lose your old one in the East River, by any possible chance?" He turned the band out. "And there doesn't seem to be any phone numbers written in this one."

"Hey, what's the idea?" complained Rustaff, finally snatching his hat back and clamping it on his head. "What do you want in here, anyhow?"

"Information about your client Arthur Bendick," said North.

"No client of mine by that name," said Rustaff, shifting his cigar to the right side.

"Sorry to contradict you," said

North, "but court records show that you put up a bond of two thousand five hundred dollars for Arthur Bendick, six weeks ago."

"Oh, Bendick. I remember now. I thought you said Bennett. That's why I didn't remember. What about Bendick?"

"There was a man found murdered in a launch on the East River this morning," said North, "whose finger prints correspond to those on file for Arthur Bendick."

"No!" Rustaff made clucking sounds with his tongue to denote surprise and grief. "That's too bad. So he got in trouble again, did he?"

"The funny part of it is," North continued, "that Bendick is alive and well and carrying on business at his old Long Island stand. What do you make of that, Rustaff?"

"You don't say!" Rustaff spread his pudgy hands in a gesture of complete astonishment. "You can soich me, Mr. North. I don't understand it. Maybe there's some mistake."

NORTH leaned forward until his face was quite close to Rustaff's. He looked the broker straight in the eyes.

"Rustaff," he said, "who was it went to jail under the name of Arthur Bendick for assault and battery six weeks ago?"

"Listen, Mr. North," said Rustaff, "all I know about Bendick is that he got pinched for beating up a guy over in the Fulton Street fish markets, and he sent for me to put up bail for him. When he pleaded guilty and went to jail, I got my bond back. That's all I know about him."

"Funny you'd risk two thousand five hundred dollars on a man you don't know any more about than that," said North.

"He put up his launch for secur-

ity," said Rustaff. "It wasn't much of a risk."

"Not as big a risk as Frank Monzello?"

"What about Monzello?"

"You put up bond to get him out last night, didn't you—just before he was murdered—or at least the man who was posing as Monzello was murdered?"

"Who, me? I did like hell!" Rustaff was emphatic. "You don't catch me putting up twenty grand in a case like that."

"You seem to know what bail was set," was North's comment.

"Sure, I know," said Rustaff. "He wanted me to put up bond for him, just like he wanted all the other brokers in this street to put it up. I wouldn't take a chance on any of those Fulton Street boids. Who did put up the bond, anyhow?"

"That's what I want to know," said North. "Somebody sent around twenty thousand in currency to get Monzello—or the bird who posed as Monzello—out of jail. It was worth twenty thousand cash to somebody to have Monzello out where they could get at him."

"Honest, Mr. North, it wasn't me! I swear it!" Rustaff raised his fat right hand solemnly. North noticed that the palm was damp with nervous perspiration. "I haven't got twenty grand in cash to my name. Honest!"

"But you know who did put up the twenty grand?"

"Mr. North, do you think I'd lie to you?"

"Yes," said North promptly, "and with a good deal of pleasure. Moreover, I think you know the name of this man who served as ringer for both Bendick and Monzello. And I think you know why he was murdered last night. How about it?"

"You're all wrong, Mr. North."

"O. K., Rustaff." North slid off

the desk, took a card from his pocket and scribbled something on the back. He tossed it across to Rustaff. "In case your conscience bothers you too much," he added, "and you can't find anybody to talk to but the cops, call me at that number. I'm the best little father confessor you ever saw."

"The cops know me, Mr. North. They know I'm on the square."

"That's fine," said North, "because you'll be hearing from the cops during the next few hours or I'm the King of England. So long, Rustaff."

NORTH left the bail-bond broker's office and headed for a lunch counter. He needed a sandwich before he went up to see Lieutenant Hoag, as he had a pretty good idea of what was coming.

He was not mistaken. As soon as he opened the door to Hoag's office, the lieutenant started in on him.

"You crooked, cross-eyed, so-and-so!" began Lieutenant Hoag in appropriate language. "Do you know what I think of you?"

"Don't tell me, Vincent. Let me guess," said North.

Hoag, however, left nothing to North's imagination. He was explicit, eloquent, and profane. He alluded to North's ancestry, his personal habits, and alleged deficiencies in body and character. When he had finished for want of breath and further vocabulary, North looked at him with an amazingly bland air of injured innocence.

"What brought this on, Vincent?" he asked.

"You stole Bendick's finger prints out of the identification bureau!" declared Hoag. "You told Hewett you were bringing them to me, you lying such-and-which!"

"Well, I was bringing the prints to you," said North, "and I am. Here they are."

"Two hours and a half to walk a hundred yards."

"I was detained," said North. "I had to eat."

"Where the hell have you been?"

"I've been winning that box of cigars, Vincent."

"You've been obstructing justice," Hoag announced. "If I had the record two hours ago, my man wouldn't have got away."

"What man, Vincent?"

"The ringer that told us this afternoon he was Arthur Bendick."

"So you think the real Bendick is the corpse you found in the launch?"

"Finger prints don't lie, North."

"So you concede me the box of cigars, Vincent? You've given up insisting that the dead man is Monzello?"

"In a pig's eye," said Hoag. "I don't concede anything. It's evident that Monzello and Bendick are the same person. Hewett says they must be."

"Want to make it two boxes of cigars, Vincent—that the finger prints in this case are guilty of a slight duplicity?"

"If you'd keep your mouth shut for a minute, North, you might find out something. What I been trying to tell you is that Bendick is gone."

"Gone?"

"Disappeared. Gave the boys I left to watch him a clean slip."

"Took their guns, too, I suppose?"

"No, but he's gone without a trace. They can't figure how he got away."

"I guess they'll have plenty of spare time for figuring after they're transferred to the far reaches of Brooklyn," said North. "What makes you think Bendick is important?"

"None of your business, North," said Hoag. "I'm through doing you favors. Next time I give you any

information it'll be when I make the arrest."

"Suit yourself, Vincent," said North, taking a hitch in his baggy trousers. "If you don't tell me, I won't tell you what Louis Rustaff told me."

"So you've seen Rustaff already, have you? What did he say?"

"Tell me what you found out about Bendick."

"I didn't find out much about Bendick, exactly," said Hoag, who, after all, was always ready to bargain with North for information. "But I found out plenty about the *Laughing Girl*. Did you notice the engines in the two launches?"

"I did," said North. "They're exactly alike: six L-head cylinders, 5½ inch bore, 6¼ stroke, generating two-hundred horsepower. What of it?"

"Did you notice the serial numbers of the engines?" asked the police lieutenant.

"I noticed that the serial number of the one in Bendick's boathouse had been rather neatly obliterated with a cold chisel," said North, lighting a cigarette.

"Not bad, for a reporter," admitted Hoag. "But I don't suppose you noted that the serial number of the engine in the launch we found the body in was AD-6991, did you?"

"Spill it," said North. "I'm all a-twitter. What did I miss?"

"The *Laughing Girl* registered under the name of Arthur Bendick is also registered as carrying engine No. AD-6991," announced Hoag.

"Huh." North squinted through his cigarette smoke. "So the murder was actually committed in Bendick's launch—and the second *Laughing Girl* is a phony?"

"Now tell me what Louis Rustaff told you."

"Nothing," replied North.

"North, if you hold out on me after I've——"

"I'm not holding out, Vincent. Rustaff claims to know nothing about Bendick except that he went his bond, and he says he hasn't the slightest idea who bailed out the ringer for Monzello last night to kill him. But Rustaff is so enthusiastically ignorant, Vincent, that he probably knows the one important fact that I'm looking for."

"What's that?" grumbled Lieutenant Hoag.

"The name of the ringer who went to jail in place of Bendick six weeks ago and Monzello just the other day and who——"

The telephone bell rang. Hoag snatched up the receiver.

"Hello. . . . Yes. . . . The hell you say! . . . Never mind spelling it, I know it already."

HOAG banged down the instrument and sat for several seconds staring at North with an expression which hovered between the jubilant and the crestfallen. Finally he said:

"You win the cigars, North. That was the identification bureau calling. Hewett wired the dead man's fingerprint classification to Washington. His prints are on file with the Navy Department down there. Seems he did a short enlistment in the navy and got a dishonorable discharge for repeatedly overstaying leave, or something. His name is Harry Daggett."

"Daggett? Didn't you——"

"I did," Hoag broke in. "I found a letter with talk about exterminating Harry Daggett. A young tramp named Phil Collins that I picked up in Shantytown had it on him. Lucky I had enough foresight to have Collins shadowed."

"Ain't it, though," said North.

"Now about those cigars, Vincent you——"

Lieutenant Hoag's telephone bell rang again. The big detective's bull neck turned slowly red as he listened. At last he broke out into profanity.

"Why, you butter-fingered rube!" he sputtered. "You thick-skulled so-and-so! How the hell'd you like to pound a beat again? . . . None of your damn excuses! Come on in!"

Hoag's face was crimson as he hung up.

"That was Monday, the man I had trailing Collins," he explained. "The damn fool lost his man in the subway."

"Your boys ain't doing so well today, Vincent," said North. "Looks as though there'd be a lot of detectives pounding beats in Brooklyn and Staten Island before you solve the murder of Harry Daggett. I guess I'll have to hustle if I want to clean up this case in time to go on my vacation at the end of the week."

"Start in by rustling your carcass out of my office, will you, North?" sputtered Hoag, still very red. "It's your fault if——"

"All right, Vincent, all right." North backed away from the police lieutenant's desk, bowing with mock politeness. "I'll go, and I won't come back until after you've sweated Louis Rustaff. When——"

"Get out of here!" ordered Hoag.

North went. He turned up his coat collar against the cold autumn wind and walked down the street, whistling to himself. Things were breaking right in his alley. He could go home and cover any late developments by telephone. He stopped at an Italian butcher shop.

"I want a pound of meat," he said.

"What kind of meat?" asked the butcher.

"Raw meat," said North, "and a couple of bones. It's for a dog."

North lived in Greenwich Village, in an apartment with a black fireplace and one hundred years of dirt neatly covered with cream-colored paint. It had a tree in the court and was very artistic. North cared neither for the tree nor the artistic atmosphere. He lived there because the neighbors did not complain much when his friends threw bottles or phonograph records out the window at three in the morning.

At the entrance to his apartment he stopped short and swore. The door was ajar. North kicked it open, glanced about rapidly, and from the doorway threw his package of dog meat across the room into the fireplace. He knew without looking that he would not need it, that the little black cocker spaniel that he had spirited away from the *Laughing Girl* that morning was gone.

As he poured himself a drink, he wondered how he would discover if the dog had been stolen, or if the door had been merely left open carelessly by the colored girl who came down from Harlem twice a week to wash his glasses and sweep the dirt from the middle of the floor under the bed.

CHAPTER XI.

MAYOR MIKE TURNS SLEUTH.

MAYOR MIKE of East River Shantytown sauntered leisurely through Madison Square. The many benches lining the paths were almost deserted, for it was getting too cold for such sedentary pursuits as sitting in the park. The trees were almost devoid of leaves. Mayor Mike, however, was devoted to his morning in the Square. He had missed it the day previous, due to that infernal business with the police. The clock in

the Metropolitan Tower chimed ten o'clock—Mayor Mike's habitual hour for his morning devotions to leisure. He cast an experienced eye over the benches, then toward the occasional trash cans, seeking an abandoned morning paper. Mayor Mike's leisure was occupied with reading of the world from which he had withdrawn to a safe philosophical distance.

He might have spared himself the long walk to Madison Square every day, for Tomkins and Stuyvesant squares—even Union Square—were closer to Shantytown. However, on the benches and in the trash cans of Tompkins and Stuyvesant squares one was likely to find only such newspapers as the *Daily Laborer*. In Union Square there was little but the *Daily Laborer*—hardly fit reading for such a staunch Republican as Mayor Mike, who read the *Call-Dispatch*. In Madison Square he could usually find a discarded copy of the *Call-Dispatch* and grumble to himself over the writings of its political-economy columnist. He spotted a copy of his favorite paper which the wind had blown under a bench, stopped to pick it up, hastily checked over the pages to make sure that no important part was missing, then settled himself to read. He skimmed headlines until he came to that rare item—one that concerned him personally. He fumbled for his corn-cob pipe with one hand while he read the story of the murder:

Police to-day are seeking six persons—five as witnesses and possible accomplices, the sixth on a charge of murder—in connection with the death of Harry Daggett, puppet of the underworld.

Daggett's body was found yesterday morning in the launch *Laughing Girl*, anchored under an East River pier near a shanty colony of squatters at the foot of East Ninth Street.

Daggett was first erroneously identi-

fied as Frank Monzello, one of the four men indicted for racketeering in Fulton Street fish markets, who was released on \$20,000 bail a few hours before the murder. Finger-print evidence, however, indicates that Daggett was a professional substitute prisoner, probably hired to serve Monzello's term for him.

In this connection, detectives want Monzello himself; a mysterious person who delivered the \$20,000 bond in cash to have Daggett, alias Monzello, released; Arthur Bendick, for whom Daggett once also served a jail term on a minor charge, and who owns the launch in which the body was found; Philip Collins, believed to be a professional killer hired to murder Daggett.

Lieutenant Vincent Hoag of the homicide squad is also working on a secondary theory that Daggett may have been killed by his wife in connivance with one Charles Hartford. Neighbors in the tenement house in East Thirteenth Street, occupied by the Daggetts, say that Mrs. Daggett disappeared the night before the murder in company with Hartford, who is described as an ardent admirer of Mrs. Daggett, posing as a friend of the family. Police learned that an insurance policy on the life of Daggett was issued about a month ago, and that the first premium was paid by a man answering the description of Hartford.

Lieutenant Hoag pointed out that the couple may have engineered the murder for the double purpose of getting rid of the husband and collecting his insurance.

Mayor Mike put down the paper and lighted his pipe. He read no further, but sat staring at the bleak branches of the leafless tree opposite his bench. The thing that he most feared had come to pass. Despite his efforts to keep Shantytown orderly and law-abiding, the shadow of disrepute had fallen upon the little colony of homeless men. Soon righteous citizens would be calling Shantytown a resort of criminals and a breeding place of crime. The police would be criticized for allowing such conditions to exist. Wreckers would come to Shantytown. The flimsy shacks would be razed in an hour. Mayor Mike wondered how

things were in Florida this season. He had not gone South for the winter in two years now—two years since he had been Mayor of Shantytown.

But no, he could not run off. He was still Mayor. His "citizens" looked to him for advice—and some of them were in trouble. He would go back and help them. He would stick as long as a shanty remained standing. Responsibility had always been foreign to his nature, but since he had accepted it this time, he would hang on to the end.

Carefully he folded his paper and put it into his pocket. He would finish reading it at home. He had not yet seen what economic drivel was being put out to-day.

He walked slowly across the square to Twenty-third Street and turned east to the river. He followed along the bulkhead line to Avenue C. then Avenue D.

MAYOR MIKE went through the hole in the rusty iron fence and stood a moment surveying his domain. The policemen were talking together in front of Spig's piano box, stamping their feet to keep warm. For the conservation of driftwood, there were rarely fires in Shantytown in the day time, or he supposed the cops would be inside one of the shacks. The sun was supposed to be all that was needed in the way of a heating plant, except on the coldest days. Mayor Mike had given orders, however, that a fire be kept in his own shanty on account of the baby. He had told Walrus to put some wood in the stove, yet no smoke curled from the crooked length of rusty pipe that rose from the rear of the hut.

Mayor Mike crossed the old brickyard toward the shack always referred to as the "City Hall." He

paused in the doorway, looking at the little box which was suspended by ropes from two hooks that Slat had installed in the sloping roof. There seemed to be no sign of life in the improvised cradle. Mayor Mike stepped up, looked in. The box was empty.

He went to the door and bellowed: "Hey, Walrus!"

There was no reply. He bellowed again. The two policemen looked at him suspiciously. Slat, the carpenter, came to the door of his shack.

"Walrus is gone down to the Fulton Market," said Slat, "for some more of his blasted fish."

Mayor Mike walked over to the carpenter's shanty.

"You got the baby in here?" he asked.

"The baby's gone," said Slat. "Didn't they tell you about it?"

"Who? Where's it gone?"

"Handsome Hartford took it."

"Handsome did? You mean Handsome had the nerve to come down here? Doesn't he know the cops are lookin' for him?" asked Mayor Mike in an undertone.

"He didn't come here," said Slat. "He sent for it. Spig met him down the street a piece—either him, or the lady, I don't remember which Spig said. Anyhow, whichever it was wanted the baby. Spig and Red took it down to 'em."

"Guess the baby'll be better off," said Mayor Mike. "It looks to be a cold night to-night for sleepin' in Shantytown. Still, I don't—" He scratched the back of his head with the stem of his corncob pipe. "Can't understand why Handsome didn't come to me. He knows he can find me every mornin' in Madison Square. Why do you suppose he risked comin' down this way, where he knew there'd be cops on the lookout for him?"

"I dunno," Slat replied. "All I know is what Spig told me."

"What else happened while I was away?"

"Not much. There was a couple of dicks around again, asking more about that kid, Phil Collins."

"What y' tell 'em?"

"They didn't talk to me this time. They talked to Spig. I heard him tell 'em that we didn't know much about Collins on account of he only came here a couple of nights ago with Handsome."

"Spig told the dicks Collins came here with Handsome?"

"Yes. Shouldn't he ought to 've told 'em that?"

"Guess it's all right," said Mayor Mike. He watched the two policemen a moment, then returned to his own domicile. He sat for five minutes, pensively smoking his pipe. Then he arose, walked up to Fourteenth Street and started across town.

THE sidewalks were already crowded with busy shoppers, mostly plump women. Mayor Mike moved among them, passing the gawdy bargain windows, the red-and-gold fronts of ten-cent stores. He was paying particular attention to the host of parasites peculiar to Fourteenth Street, beggars and catch-penny hawkers who made their way through the crowd of shoppers: A legless pencil vender with a bulldog, two blind men playing saxophones, a white-whiskered patriarch selling pretzels, a billowy matron with bargains in toothpaste and jigsaw puzzles, brass-voiced sidewalk venders of popular songs, imitation pearl necklaces, hot chestnuts. Mayor Mike strolled through the restless throng until he perceived, towering above the crowd, a fuzzy greenish fedora and the narrow

shoulders of a rusty black overcoat with a mangy velvet collar. He changed his course, approaching the fedora from the back.

"Here y'are, ladies, the bargain of a lifetime. Genuine lace handkerchiefs for a quarter. Hand-made Brussels lace, an imported article that'd cost you two-three dollars in any store on Fifth Avenue. Purchase of a bankrupt stock enables me to offer them to you at the ridiculous price of twenty-five cents apiece. Step up, lady, and examine them. Take it in your hand, lady, and satisfy yourself that it's real. There's not a machine-made piece in the lot. Look at this one, golden with age. How many? You, too, lady? Giving them away for twenty-five cents to——"

Handsome Hartford was standing in the midst of a crowd of open-mouthed ladies. In front of him was a small folding stand, piled with squares of lace. Several eager women were fingering the lace incredulously. Handsome Hartford was making change, pocketing quarters, when Mayor Mike tapped him on the shoulder.

Immediately, without looking back, Hartford snapped shut the top of his stand, folding his lace inside it, kicked together the legs, put the whole under his arm and started off through the crowd.

Mayor Mike grabbed his arm. Hartford turned and smiled nervously.

"Hello, Mayor," he said. "I thought it was the bulls. I haven't got a city license to peddle. I certainly was scared."

"Seen the papers this morning, Handsome?" asked Mayor Mike.

Hartford nodded.

"Then how come you takin' chances on the street?"

"Got to have some jack, Mayor

Mike. I want to get Isabel and the kid out of town."

"How come you didn't get word to me in the Square this morning, if you wanted the baby sent back?"

"I didn't send for the baby," said Hartford.

"Somebody did," said Mayor Mike. "While I was gone, somebody told Spig you wanted the baby. He took it away."

"Good gosh and seven fishes!" exclaimed Hartford. A shadow of worry crossed his face. Then he smiled. "Maybe Isabel did it," he added. "She's been wanting the baby with her."

"Better go right away and find out," counseled Mayor Mike.

"Come along, Mayor." Hartford was pushing ahead with long strides.

"Tell me one thing, Handsome," said Mayor Mike, puffing slightly in his efforts to keep up, "I ain't askin' for no confessions or anythin', but am I doin' right by the boys in Shantytown by givin' you and this lady a helpin' hand?"

"I told you when I brought Isabel to Shantytown," said Hartford, "that I wanted to hide her from people who didn't mean her any good. I guess I wasn't successful. Somebody knew where she was—somebody, probably, who'd been following me—and he left the body of her husband as a warning of what might happen to her."

"How do you know the body was left there for her?" asked Mayor Mike.

"Because on the night of the murder, just before dawn, a man's voice called Isabel's name just outside your shack, where she was sleeping. The man told her to look under the pier——"

"Whose voice was it?" asked Mayor Mike.

"She didn't recognize it."

"Who does she think it was?"

"It might have been one of half a dozen people."

Mayor Mike stopped suddenly at the street corner.

"So long, Handsome," he said, holding out his hand. "If you need me, you know my office hours in the Square."

"Aren't you coming with me, Mayor Mike?"

"Nope," said Mayor Mike. "Don't tell me where your hide-out is. Then if anybody asks me, I won't know."

CHAPTER XII. THE BABY HUNT.

ISABEL DAGGETT had a hysterical fit of weeping when Handsome Hartford repeated Mayor Mike's story—far more hysterical than the one that had followed the discovery of her husband's body. After all, Harry Daggett had never been precisely a model husband, and during the past three months he had been taking out his feeling of frustration by giving her thorough and periodic beatings, whereas the baby—

"I told you we should have taken him before," she wailed.

Hartford tried to comfort her by saying there had been some mistake. Perhaps Mayor Mike had not understood properly. After all, he had not seen Spig himself.

But Isabel Daggett would not be comforted.

"They've taken him for a hostage! They think I know too much. They have seen in the papers that the police are looking for you and me. They think we'll talk if we're caught, then they'd kill the baby."

She began to scream.

Hartford put his hand gently over her mouth, tried to reason with her. He reminded her that there were

men working on other floors of the loft building in which they were hiding. She must not deliberately give them away.

Isabel Daggett struggled briefly, then stopped screaming. She looked about her, wild-eyed. They were in a dingy, low-ceilinged storeroom, piled high with packing cases and bales wrapped in waterproof covers. She dropped back, trembling, on a deep pile of laces. Hartford had not told her that the improvised divan was worth a fortune in some of the most valuable laces of Europe—Brussels, Point de Paris, Alençon, Bruges, Valenciennes. To her it was just a rather hard makeshift of a couch on which she had passed a cold and uncomfortable night. Then she arose, standing very straight, as though suddenly imbued with new strength. Her dreamy gray eyes gleamed with the unfamiliar light of determination born of despair.

"Maybe June can help me," she announced in a voice hoarse with emotion. "I'll go to see my sister. Maybe June will know where the baby is."

"Don't be a fool, Isabel," Hartford said. "You're safe here. You—"

"I'm going to the Vandoria. I must do something. June will help."

She flung back her head, tossing her curly hair away from her face in which a look akin to madness was creeping.

"Isabel."

She was already running across the floor, frantically making her way among the bales and packing cases. Before Hartford could stop her she had opened a door and was hurrying down a dark, dusty back stairway.

Hartford followed. He crossed a littered courtyard just as she disappeared into a passageway. As she reached the street, he decided that to pursue her now would only at-

tract attention. He watched her vanish among the trucks and vans that choked Greene Street.

IN penthouse B of the Vandoria Apartments, Lieutenant Hoag was questioning William Wight. Radio patrolmen, who had answered an emergency call from the Vandoria the night previous after Hoag had gone off duty, had turned in a report that sent Hoag scurrying for more information.

"Why do you think this man Collins came back, then?" Hoag was asking.

"I suspect there was some sentimental attachment between him and my secretary," Wight replied. "I surprised them once in a tête-à-tête."

"You don't think he came back after being fired because of the Daggett murder?"

"Well——" Wight ran his fingers through his snowy mane. "Inasmuch as my secretary, Miss Lawn, is a sister of Daggett's wife, and since you say that Collins is implicated, I wouldn't be at all surprised. Collins seemed to be a generally suspicious and shifty character during the short time he worked here. That, I imagine, was one of the reasons he was discharged. When I found him lurking on my terrace last night, I didn't recognize him until he attacked me, and I was forced to shoot in self-defense. You say he hasn't been apprehended? He must be wounded. I'm sure——"

"No sign of him," said Hoag. "Tell me, Mr. Wight, what sort of man was this Daggett?"

"I never saw him," said Wight. "Neither he nor his wife ever came to see Miss Lawn here. I didn't permit it. I know them only from hearing their names."

"What time was it that the ambulance came for Miss Lawn?"

"It was nearly midnight, I should say."

"And you don't think she was putting it on?"

"I hardly think so. Miss Lawn was clearly a nervous type, and I had noticed that she had been acting queerly for some time. The excitement of last night must have sent her completely out of her head, and I thought it best to have her taken to some psychopathic hospital for observation. The ambulance surgeon can tell you about her hysterical behavior, the insane way in which she screamed accusations at me—of every crime under the sun."

"She had enough sense left to jump out of the ambulance and get clean away, anyhow," said Lieutenant Hoag.

"Very careless of them," said Wight, with a movement of his bushy eyebrows. "She might prove to be a dangerous maniac. And she's still at large?"

"Yep," said Hoag. "Did this man Daggett ever telephone you, Mr. Wight?"

"Never," said Wight.

"Never telephoned this apartment?"

"Possibly he may have telephoned to my secretary. I couldn't be sure of that."

"That might explain his having the telephone number of the Vandoria written in his hat?"

"It might."

"Where did your secretary work, Mr. Wight?"

"In the next room."

Hoag got up and walked to the door.

"That her typewriter?" he asked.

"That's the machine she used."

"Have you got a letter or something—a sample of the typing that machine does?"

"I don't believe there are any let-

ters around," said Wight. "Couldn't you make your own sample?"

"Maybe," said Hoag. He fitted a piece of paper into the typewriter, sat down, and pecked clumsily at the keyboard until he had written several lines, including impressions of every letter and character.

As he pulled the paper out of the machine, the telephone bell rang.

"I'll take that, Mr. Wight," said Hoag. "It's probably one of the men I left downstairs in the lobby."

He picked up the instrument.

"Hello, Hoag speaking. . . . She is? . . . The hell you say! Well, bring her up."

He replaced the receiver.

"The Widow Daggett is down in the lobby," he explained to Wight, "yelling her head off for her sister and raising hell generally. They're bringing her up."

"I wish they wouldn't," said Wight. "I'd rather not have anything to do with her."

"They're bringing her up," repeated the lieutenant, looking at Wight with steady eyes.

Two minutes later Isabel Daggett entered between two detectives. She was badly disheveled and sobbing hysterically.

"Where's June? Where's my sister?"

"Sit down, lady," said Hoag, taking her by the arm and leading her to a chair. "Keep calm and everything'll be all right. You know this gentleman, don't you?"

He indicated Wight.

Wight ran his fingers quickly through his hair. Isabel Daggett stared at him without speaking.

"Ever see this man before?" prompted Hoag.

Wight put his hands in his pockets, watching silently.

Isabel Daggett shook her head.

"I don't know him," she sobbed.

"I want June Lawn. June can help me find my baby. I want——"

"What happened to your baby, Mrs. Daggett?" asked Hoag.

"Charlie made me leave him in that Shantytown, and he's——"

"So that was *your* baby!" exploded Hoag. "And that old codger tried to make me believe it was his. I knew it wasn't."

"They've taken it away," sobbed Mrs. Daggett.

"Who's taken it?"

"I don't know!" wailed Mrs. Daggett.

"You're sure you don't know that gentleman standing there?"

"I never saw him before. I want my——"

"All right, Mrs. Daggett," Hoag took her arm again. "You come with me. I'll find your baby for you." He nodded to Wight. "I think I'll take her downtown, after all," he said. "Hope I haven't caused you too much trouble."

"Not at all," said Wight.

At the sound of his voice, Isabel Daggett turned to look at Wight again.

"Come on, Mrs. Daggett," said Lieutenant Hoag.

Wight watched them get into the elevator, then closed the door.

CHAPTER XIII. RENDEZVOUS.

JUNE LAWN had spent most of the night shivering in a clump of bushes in Central Park. It had been simple enough escaping from the ambulance which Wight had called with the idea of having her committed as insane. She had merely feigned exhausted sleep. When the ambulance surgeon's attention was relaxed she had come to life, opened the doors and jumped out. She had bruised herself, as she

landed on the paved park road, but the excitement of flight and hiding, listening breathlessly as she heard the ambulance crew pass near her place of concealment when they came back to look for her, made her forget her aches. It was only when she felt herself definitely free that her troubles really began. What was she to do now?

When it was daylight she took a subway to Grand Central Station and performed a rudimentary toilet in the dressing room there. She spent most of the morning at breakfast in an obscure restaurant, reading and rereading the accounts of the Daggett murder in the morning papers, until she was certain that the waitress was looking at her suspiciously. She paid her check and went out.

Instinctively she went to her sister's address in East Thirteenth Street, but when she saw two uniformed policemen standing on the stoop, she walked past without making inquiries. Then she headed for East River and Shantytown. Phil Collins had told her to come to Shantytown if she needed help.

She hesitated as she stepped through the hole in the fence. Men looked at her suspiciously, with glances that were almost hostile. She started walking through the colony of huts. A man with red hair came up to her.

"Help you, lady?" he asked.

"I'm looking for a man named Myron Klinger," she said, inventing a name. She felt that she ought to have some excuse for invading Shantytown and after she had read the papers, she wasn't sure that she ought to mention Collins's name. "I understand he lives here. I have a message for him from his family in the West."

The man shook his red head.

"Nobody here by that name—

though there's plenty here that we don't know their names. Look around and maybe you'll see him."

June Lawn walked farther across Shantytown. She sensed that some one was following her. She stopped and turned around. The man came up. He was a dark, slim man, with sideburns that came halfway down each tanned cheek. He wore a striped jersey sweater and a navy blue beret.

"Did you say you were looking for a man named Collins?" he asked.

"I didn't say that," said the girl.

"But you are looking for Collins?"

The girl did not answer.

"It's all right to talk," said the man. "I'm a friend of his. You're Miss Lawn, ain't you?"

"Yes," admitted the girl.

"Collins left word that if you came down here to tell you to meet him at this address at midnight to-night."

He handed the girl a slip of paper. She read a scribbled address: "101½ Greene Street."

"It's a loft building," the man explained. "You go right through to the back of the courtyard, where the trucks come in, and take the little stairway in back. It's the third floor where he'll be."

"Thank you," said the girl, staring at the address. How did Collins come to choose that place? She supposed it was all right.

She left hurriedly. The man watched her leave Shantytown, then started to saunter after her. As he reached the fence, the entrance was blocked by the bulky form of Mayor Mike returning. Mayor Mike slapped him on the chest with the flat of his hand.

"Spig," said Mayor Mike, "what's this hooey you been handin' out about Handsome sendin' for the baby?"

"That's straight," said Spig.

"Straight hell," said Mayor Mike. "I just come from seein' Handsome and he says he didn't do nothin' of the kind."

"Either he's crazy or one of us is lying," replied Spig. "He told me it was too cold for the baby down here and I was to take the baby to one of these nurseries where it can get taken care of. He gave me money to pay the brat's board and keep."

"I don't believe it," said Mayor Mike.

"I got the receipt from the nursery," said Spig.

"Let's see it."

"Handsome told me not to tell nobody where the kid was, but I guess he wouldn't care if you knew."

Spig displayed a slip of paper, carefully holding his thumb over the address of the nursery.

"You put him down in my name!" exclaimed Mayor Mike.

"Sure," said Spig. "Didn't I hear you tell the cops it was your kid?"

Mayor Mike snorted.

"Spig," he said, "why should Handsome be lyin' to me about this?"

"Search me," said Spig. "But if you don't believe me, I can take you over to the nursery and show you the brat."

Mayor Mike seemed to be studying Spig's sideburns for a long minute. At last he asked:

"Any news of that Collins kid?"

"No word," said Spig.

Mayor Mike walked slowly to his shack, sat down in his chair, filled his pipe, and unfolded the morning paper he had not finished reading.

Night stalked up East River to Shantytown, cloaked in a cold, swirling veil of half-melted snow. Fires burned in cracked stoves and dented oil cans, making bright orange chinks shine through the flimsy walls of the rickety shelters. To the men

inside, it was the wind that revealed the chinks. They sat huddled lose to their meager fires, wondering over the price that penniless men paid for being independent through the winter. The municipal lodging house, at least, was heated.

CLOSE on the heels of darkness Phil Collins came to Shantytown. He did not come through the hole in the iron fence, but over the wall of an adjoining foundry. He came stealthily, for he knew that Daggett's body had been identified, that he was being sought again by the police. Once inside the abandoned brickyard, however, he walked boldly—as though he had been there all day—trusting to the wet night to protect him. He went directly to Mayor Mike's shack.

Mayor Mike paused in the midst of explaining the war debts and the gold standard to Walrus, and stared at Collins as though he were a ghost.

"What you doin' here?" demanded Mayor Mike. "Don't you read the papers?"

"Nobody saw me come," said Collins. His coat glistened with the wet.

"They's probably a couple o' dicks sittin' around somewhere no farther away'n I could toss this stove," said Mayor Mike. He got out of his chair to turn down the lamp.

"I had to come," said Collins. "Anyhow, I'm in the clear on this Daggett business."

"Did Handsome get you mixed up in it?"

"Not exactly. I'm not really mixed up in it—except from outside appearances."

"The insides o' jails is often filled by outside appearances," said Mayor Mike. "I remember one time in Chicago——"

"The reason I came back," interrupted Collins, "is that I told a girl that she could find me here if she needed my help. That was before I knew the cops were after me again. Has she been around?"

"Don't know of it," said Mayor Mike. "You, Walrus?"

Walrus shook his head. Collins's face darkened.

"In case she does come," he said, preparing to leave, "will you take the message? Tell her I'll come back and get it to-morrow."

"You might ask some o' the boys," said Mayor Mike. "Had any supper?"

"I ate three cents' worth at that penny cafeteria in the Thirties," said Collins. "I got two cents left so I can eat again to-morrow."

"Listen," said Mayor Mike. "I don't like to slander the good name o' any citizen o' Shantytown, but it's my duty to warn you to listen twice to anything' that either Handsome Hartford or Spig says to you. One of 'em's a liar—I dunno which."

"Thanks," said Collins. "Good night."

"Night," said Mayor Mike.

"Ditto," said Walrus.

Collins stepped out into the darkness. He stood a moment, blinded by a swirl of melted snow. As he blinked the moisture off his eyelashes, he saw a shadow of a man move out from the corner of Mayor Mike's shack. He thought he heard the name "Collins" whispered into the wind. The shadow stood motionless as he moved close to it. He peered into the man's face and recognized Spig.

"Girl came around here 's afternoon looking for you," said Spig.

"She was? Where'd she go?" asked Collins eagerly.

"She wanted to see you bad," said Spig. "Said for you to meet her at

five minutes to twelve at 101½ Greene Street."

"To-night?"

"Yeah. Five minutes to midnight. Here, I wrote down the number on a piece of paper. She says it's a loft building and to go through the courtyard where the trucks come in, and go up the stairs in back to the third floor. She'll meet you there."

"Thanks," said Collins. Then he remembered that Mayor Mike had said to listen twice to whatever Spig or Handsome Hartford told him. "Did—do you happen to know the girl's name?" he asked.

"June or Lawn or something like that," said Spig.

That checked all right, Collins thought. Still—

"Mayor Mike didn't say anything about a girl coming for me," he said.

"The Mayor was gone when she came," said Spig. "She says I was to tell you and nobody else. Some sort of secret."

That sounded reasonable, too. Mayor Mike said he didn't know whether Spig or Handsome Hartford was the liar. Probably Handsome. He had acted furtively before the murder. Anyhow, Collins could not take a chance on not going to the rendezvous, if June Lawn really wanted to see him. He would go.

"Thanks," he said again. "So long, Spig."

He walked across Shantytown toward the foundry wall. As he passed the old limousine body in which Red lived, he heard Red, fortified against the cold by an internal dose of canned heat, singing lustily all by himself. Swinging himself over the wall, Collins caught fragments of a rousing limerick

"The mate of a yacht,
An ignorant sot,
Who always spelled——"

The whistle of a tug, creeping up the river in the snowy fog, bawled like a calf awaiting slaughter.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SQUALL AT SEA.

THE bulky two-masted fishing schooner *Spray* buried her nose in the gray-green sea. Tons of glassy water pouring over the bow was churned white as it rushed over the planking, sloshing about the deck house, and streamed off the sides in a great white fringe as the ship lifted sickeningly on the crest of the next wave. All canvas had been struck and the *Spray* chugged into the teeth of a screaming gale, forging slowly ahead on her auxiliary engine. A leaden sky was bringing early darkness.

Frank Monzello, uncrowned king of the Fulton fish-market racketeers, sat in the skipper's tiny cabin, feeling very miserable. His pasty face was pale, with a distinct yellow tinge, verging on green about the corners of his mouth. His dark hair, usually slicked down flat, was disheveled. What was more, Monzello, the dapper, didn't care. He was seasick. He had been ignominiously seasick all day. He couldn't stay on deck because of the weather. He couldn't stay below because the gasoline fumes from the auxiliary engine increased his nausea.

The small portable radio receiver in the skipper's cabin was droning figures, hours of the clock, directions of the wind, and a code broadcast from a short-wave station in Boston that gave men at sea quotations on the current prices of fish, so that skippers could estimate the value of their catch, and come in early, if necessary, to meet the market.

"Hell!" Monzello got up, twisted

the dial of the radio. "Let's get some news bulletins."

He turned the knob. The loud-speaker howled, sang, and vibrated with jazz. Monzello tuned in on a New York station broadcasting news. He listened listlessly to the result of a prize fight, political gossip, election returns from a State voting to repeal prohibition. Then he stiffened with interest.

"Here's some police news for you, folks," the announcer was saying. "The body of the murdered man found on the launch *Laughing Girl* in East River this morning, at first thought to be that of Frank Monzello, alleged fish-market racketeer, has been positively identified tonight as that of Harry Daggett. Police say Daggett was a minor underworld character hired by Monzello to go to jail in his place. They are looking for Monzello, of course, but they're looking for other suspects, too. There's Mrs. Daggett, for instance, widow of the murdered man, who disappeared with a man named Hartford, the night of the murder. They're looking for Arthur Bendick who owns the launch *Laughing Girl*. They already have several suspects in custody and Lieutenant Hoag of the homicide squad expects developments in a few hours. This program has been coming to you through the courtesy of—"

Monzello turned off the radio. He swallowed hard to fight down his nausea.

"Skipper, you got to take me back to New York," he announced.

The skipper had been getting into his oilskin pants, preparatory to going on deck.

"What you want to go back for?" he asked. "Sounds to me like you're wanted for murder. You're better off out here."

"I got to go back and keep things

in hand," he said. "Those damn fools will make a mess of everything unless I'm there. Why do you suppose I hired that boob Daggett to take the rap for me in the first place? So I could keep my hands free to reorganize. I said last May that I'd be boss of those docks in six months, and I will. I made a mistake sneaking out to sea like this. I shouldn't have listened to those others. Frank Monzello don't need to hide."

"Besides," said the skipper solemnly, "a man don't get seasick in jail."

"The hell with that!" said Monzello. His effort to swagger was only partly successful. "They won't see Frank Monzello in the can. Not yet, they won't. I'm too smart for 'em. Take me back, skipper. I got business in New York."

I AIN'T due back until Friday dawn," said the skipper. "I got fish to catch. This ain't no pleasure cruise, even if you are a passenger."

"I'll pay for whatever damn fish you don't catch," said Monzello. "I never let a few measly dollars keep me from having my way."

The skipper finished putting on his oilskins before he replied.

"You may be able to graft half a million dollars a year outa those poor, scared fishmongers in the Fulton Market," he said at last, "but I'm still skipper of this schooner. I'll be damned if I have to take orders from no seasick racketeer."

"So you're not going back?"

"The *Spray* docks Friday morning," said the skipper.

Frank Monzello's tortured face turned a shade greener.

"All right," he said. His old bluster was beginning to come through. "You'll remember this."

Something in the tone of Monzello's voice caused a troubled expression to come into the skipper's eyes. He seemed to hesitate, as though seeking a way to give in to Monzello, without losing face as skipper.

"Tell you what," said the skipper, drawing a deep breath. "We may cross some other smack on her way in to-night. I could put you aboard her, if you're set on getting back."

"I don't care how you do it," said Monzello. "But get me back."

An hour later the skipper of the *Spray* hailed the red-and-green lights of another small craft that came bobbing toward him out of the stormy night. The voice borne on the wind from the direction of the running lights announced that she was the *Alfred Q.*, bound for New York.

With a line around his waist, Frank Monzello was transferred to the inbound schooner. The *Alfred Q.* was due at the Fulton Street docks at dawn Thursday.

CHAPTER XV.

NORTH HAS CALLERS.

I START on my vacation in two days, Vincent," said Jim North, pulling open a drawer in the lieutenant's desk and helping himself to a cigar. "Only two days more to solve the mystery of the murder of Harry Daggett."

"If you don't keep your damn nose out of this, North, the mystery won't be solved in two years," growled Hoag. "You've bawled up every lead we've got so far. I got a good notion to have you locked up for obstructing justice."

"So you won't tell me what you sweated out of Louis Rustaff?" said North.

"We didn't get a thing."

"You had him up here for five hours. You must have got something. What's the matter? Run out of rubber hose?"

"Go on home, North," said Hoag.

"All right," said North. "If you don't tell me, I'll get it from Rustaff himself."

"You won't even get near the jail," said Hoag.

"You got him charged with murder?"

"No," admitted Hoag.

North laughed out great clouds of smoke.

"Then Rustaff'll be out on bail tonight," said North. "I'll even tell you the name of the judge and the amount of the bond he'll fix."

Hoag swore.

"Don't act so unfamiliar with the workings of our courts and the practices of bail-bond brokers, Vincent," laughed North. "Somebody might take you for a policeman. And if you try to keep Rustaff from getting bail, he'll be out on a writ of habeas corpus first thing in the morning. Shall I talk to him then?"

"Go home and talk to yourself," growled Hoag.

"Cheerio, Vincent," said North, pulling his hat down over his eyes, preparatory to leaving. "Thanks for the stogie."

North took a taxi home. During the ride, he occupied his mind inventing means of putting the fare on his expense account.

As he opened the door of his apartment, he saw a tiny spot of ruddy light glowing in the darkness across the room. He stood still in the doorway. His door had been locked—of that he was sure.

He stepped into the dark room. He sniffed at the fragrance of burning tobacco. The glowing point of light described a short downward arc, as though a man had removed

a cigarette from his mouth. The door clicked shut behind North. The smoker cleared his throat.

North's hand groped nervously over the wall, seeking the electric switch. As his fingers found the button, he hesitated. What would happen when he switched on the light? Would the revelation of his position bring a fusillade of shots? He had no idea who the man with the cigarette might be, but for the moment North had the advantage of him—if he were only armed. Still, the man in the dark had a perfect target to shoot at when North was silhouetted in the doorway a moment ago, and there had been no shooting.

"Can't we have a little light, Mr. North?" asked a high, squeaky voice.

North snapped the switch.

IN the easiest easy-chair sat a lean man in a greasy leather wind-breaker. North recognized his sharp, weather-tanned face.

"Hello, Bendick," said North. He noticed that Bendick was not smoking. His gaze traveled across the table. The burning cigarette, the lighted end pointing toward the door, was lying on the edge of an ash tray four feet from Bendick.

Bendick followed North's gaze.

"I don't take chances, Mr. North," he said, in reply to North's unasked question. "Some people is jumpy. Some people shoot at cigarette butts in dark rooms."

"Come for your dog, Bendick?" asked North.

"What dog?"

"The black cocker spaniel."

"I heard you sneaked that cocker off the boat while the cops was busy with Daggett's body," said Bendick.

"Well informed, aren't you?"

"Pretty well," said Bendick. "But I didn't come about the dog. It ain't my dog."

"You had him with you on Long Island."

"I was just taking care of him for a friend."

"What friend?"

"Guess you heard about me slipping away from those dicks over at my place. Know how I did it? Easy. Applejack."

"What friend?" North repeated.

"They liked my applejack," Bendick continued, blithely ignoring North's question. "They finished the bottle. I went down in the cellar for another. They's a back door to the cellar——"

"You're not going to tell me who owns the dog?"

"No."

"Suppose I get the cops?"

"You wouldn't do that, Mr. North," squeaked Bendick. "You would first find out what I came here for. You are a newspaper reporter, not a cop. I used to write a little myself."

"Well, what did you come here for?"

"To wait for a telephone call," said Bendick.

"Nice of you to make your headquarters in my apartment," said North. "Why did you pick me for the honor?"

"When you come to my place with Lieutenant Hoag, I ask one of the dicks who you are," Bendick replied. "He tells me you are North of the *Tabloid*. I read your paper every day."

"Thanks," said North dryly.

"I notice," Bendick continued, "that the *Tabloid* goes strong for inside crime stuff. Confessions of murderers. Stuff like that." He pulled a crumpled piece of newspaper out of his pocket and unfolded it. "Last week you had this: 'Pretty Ax Slayer Bares All. Condemned Blond Who Killed Millionaire's Son

Writes Exclusive Story for *Tabloid* and——"

"Don't read it to me," interrupted North. "I wrote it."

"You——"

"Sure. That woman can't even write her own name."

"But she got the money for it, just the same?"

"Plenty," said North.

"How much you suppose," Bendick asked, "the *Tabloid* would pay for the inside story of the Daggett murder?"

"So that's it."

"How much?"

"Damn little," said North. "It's a low-life story. Daggett wasn't anybody important——"

"But the story is good," insisted Bendick shrilly. "Even the *Times* put it on the first page to-day, on account of the scandal of substitute prisoners and the fish-market racket being important news. How much? Ten grand?"

"You're dreaming," said North. "Five hundred dollars, maybe."

"I got to have five thousand at least."

"Not a chance in the world."

"Then I'll take it somewhere else," squeaked Bendick. "I'll go when I get my phone call."

"Wait a minute," said North. "If you want, I'll query the office on it. How soon can you dictate the story?"

"It's already written," said Bendick.

"Let's see it."

"It ain't here. I got to have the money first."

"And what protection would I have that this story of yours isn't phony?"

"You could give me a check," squeaked Bendick. "If the story ain't right, you could stop payment on the check."

NORTH pulled a flattened pack from his pocket and poked a twisted cigarette into his mouth. While he was fumbling for a match, the telephone bell rang in the next room.

Bendick sprang to his feet, stared for the door, then stopped and looked at North. The bell rang again.

"If that's the call you were expecting," said North, "you'd better answer it. I'm going down to the corner for a bottle of gin."

Bendick whipped out a gun.

"You stay here," he ordered in his high voice. "You ain't gonna trace this call."

North stared at the gun. The bell continued to ring. North walked deliberately up to Bendick. Bendick did not move. North scratched his match on the barrel of Bendick's revolver, and lighted his cigarette. The bell was still ringing. North blew smoke in Bendick's face.

"Go answer the phone," he said.

Still holding his gun, Bendick stepped up to the instrument. North leaned indolently against the wall and listened.

"Hello," said Bendick. ". . . Yes, yes. . . . Everything's set. . . . Midnight, I ain't forgot. . . . Sure, I'll wait till they're all in. . . . No, not a chance of it. . . . No, there ain't no fire escape on that side, I looked. No time at all. It'll go up like a box of matches. I took care of that to-night. . . . Sure, it can't fail. Good-by."

He stood up and pocketed his revolver.

"Mind if I use my phone?" asked North.

"Shoot," said Bendick.

North stepped over, lifted the receiver.

"Official 55," he said into the transmitter. "Hello, this is North, Stuy-

vesant 0—5183. Give me a report on the last incoming call, please."

"Don't try to bluff me," said Bendick. "You can't trace a call after the party's hung up."

"I forgot to mention," said North, putting his hand over the transmitter, "that I have a standing order with the phone company to watch all calls to this phone. This isn't the first time that. . . . Hello. . . . Yes. . . . Pay station, eh? Where is the booth located? . . . Waverly near Greene Street? Thanks. Good-by."

"Lotta good that'll do you," squeaked Bendick. "You don't think the party'll hang around the phone booth, waiting for you to go after him, do you?"

"I was just curious, that's all," said North. "And now I'll call my office on that proposition of yours."

He called another number and conversed in an undertone. His cigarette waggled between his lips as he spoke into the transmitter. When he had finished, he announced:

"Bendick, the *Tabloid* is foolish enough to think your story is worth as much as you do. They'll send a check for five grand down to my apartment as soon as I'm convinced that the story is authentic. I'm not convinced yet."

"Why not?" piped Bendick. "I own the *Laughing Girl*, don't I?"

"You told Hoag yesterday afternoon that you didn't know Frank Monzello. A man who doesn't know Monzello can't give the real low-down on the murder of Harry Daggett."

"I was lying to Hoag. I know Monzello."

"Know where he is?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"He ain't in New York."

"I guessed that much yesterday."

He's out with the fishing fleet, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"What schooner?"

Bendick hesitated.

"I dunno," he squeaked.

"The deal's off," said North.

Bendick walked across the room, then turned around.

"Monzello's on the *Spray*," he said.

"When did the *Spray* leave port?"

"Yesterday morning."

"Yesterday was Wednesday. Yesterday morning was when they found Daggett's body. Then Monzello was in New York when Daggett was murdered."

"Maybe he was," said Bendick.

"When does the *Spray* get back to port?"

"I dunno," said Bendick.

"Don't go to the trouble of lying about something I can find out easy enough for myself."

Bendick shifted his cud again.

"I think the *Spray* is due at the Fulton Street docks at dawn Friday. That's to-morrow," he said.

"Fine," said North. "That's several hours before the banks open. If Monzello isn't on the *Spray*, I'll know your story's phony and I'll stop payment on that check you're getting. That O. K.?"

"O. K.," said Bendick.

"Go get your story," said North, "and I'll send for the check."

"There's one condition," said Bendick. "You got to give me your word that there'll be no cops here when I get back."

"That's understood."

"And you got to give me six hours start to get outa town."

"Taking a vacation?"

"I think I'll go to Europe," said Bendick. "I'm afraid the *Laughing Girl* getting mixed up in this murder might hurt my business."

"I can only guarantee you until

five in the morning," said North. "The last edition comes off the press at five."

"You're printing it right away, you mean?"

"Have to," said North.

"All right, I'll take a chance," said Bendick. "I guess I can get far enough away by five."

"How far do you have to go now to get your story?"

"I'll be back here at twelve thirty."

"Can't make it by midnight?"

"Twelve thirty," repeated Bendick.

"That's the dead line," said North. "If you get here any later than that, the deal's off."

"I'll be here," said Bendick. He patted his gun pocket. "And I'm warning you, that if you don't keep your word about the cops, there'll be numerous sudden deaths hereabouts—even if one of 'em is me."

He backed out of the apartment, closing the door after him.

NORTH switched out the light, then went to the door and opened it a crack. He heard Bendick's footsteps going down the last stairs. He stood listening after Bendick had gone out into the street. He thought he heard a board creak on the stairs leading to the next floor above. Then he noticed for the first time that some one had extinguished the light in the stairway. He struck a match.

By the sputtering flare, he saw the back of a man trying to walk quietly upstairs. He thought he recognized the corpulent outlines, the derby hat.

"Hey, Rustaff," he called. "Where the hell you going?"

Louis Rustaff, the bail-bond broker, turned.

"Mr. North!" he exclaimed. "I was just looking for your apartment."

"I don't live on that floor above," said North. "Why didn't you ring the bell downstairs?"

"The street door was open, so I came on up. I wanted——"

"How long you been standing outside on the stairs here?"

"I just got here," said Rustaff. "I guess you know they had me locked up. I was just able to arrange bail a little while ago. You gave me your address yesterday and said I should come to see you if I had anything to say. Something important has toined up, Mr. North. Can you come down to my office right away?"

The match went out. North stepped back inside his apartment and turned on the electricity. He looked at his watch. Quarter to twelve.

"I'm going to be tied up here for the next hour," said North. "Talk to me here."

"Somebody's waiting in my office," said Rustaff. "I gotta go back to him. It's oigent. I didn't phone you because my wires are tapped. When can you come over?"

"I'll be there at one o'clock," said North. "Wait for me."

"I soitainly will, Mr. North," said Rustaff. Perspiration was running down his round, flabby face. "I'll be looking for you."

North watched him run down the stairs three at a time.

CHAPTER XVI. GASOLINE.

AT ten minutes before midnight on Thursday, Phil Collins was walking down Greene Street toward the address at which Spig had said June Lawn was to meet him. He passed dark cliffs of ugly, lifeless loft buildings. The neighborhood, occupied by small manufacturing firms and whole-

salers, was deserted at night. His footsteps echoed on the wet pavement.

The cold had increased. The drizzle had turned to sleet. Occasional flakes of soft, damp snow clung to his thin coat. It was hard to read the numbers on the buildings.

It was nearly midnight when he located 101½ Greene Street. The number was over an archway through which trucks could drive into a courtyard. Beside the arch were several tarnished black-and-gold signs. By the dim light from the street lamp at the far corner he read them:

ROSEN
Celluloid Collars
REVELATION LACE FACTORY
BOYS' TROUSERS

A square of damp cardboard, hanging from a nail, flapped in the wind, bearing a message scribbled in pencil. Collins took one hand from his pocket to hold the cardboard steady. He read:

Girl operator wanted

He walked on through the driveway, wondering what he would say if he were stopped by a night watchman. He saw nobody about, however. He crossed the sleet-swept courtyard and looked up at the windows of the loft building. They were all dark. He wondered why June Lawn had picked this particular place as a rendezvous; perhaps because it was isolated—desolate, even.

At the back of the court he found the door that Spig had told him about. He turned the knob. The door opened. He stepped inside, closing the door behind him. It was pitch dark inside. He sniffed. The darkness reeked with a peculiar odor—an unclean smell of dust and cobwebs, blended with a faint, sweetish

scent that might have been the fumes of raw gasoline.

He stood still for several seconds, listening. He tried to strike a match, but the match was wet. Then he decided that perhaps he had better make his way in the dark. He advanced with groping steps until his foot struck something hard. It was the stairway Spig had mentioned. He started to climb.

At the second-floor landing he stopped again. He thought he had heard a footstep. He looked behind him. He saw nothing in the darkness. He stood motionless. Again he thought he heard a sound of movement.

He turned toward the door at the second landing. The door was closed. His eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness, but he could not read the sign tacked on the panel. He reached for the door-knob and tried to turn it. It turned slowly, stiffly, as if some one were holding it from the other side. Or perhaps the spring was merely stiff. Whatever it was, he could not open the door. Locked, probably.

Collins continued his way up the stairs. His heartbeat increased as a worn, wooden step creaked under his weight. Something about the old loft building was making him jumpy. The smell, perhaps. The odor of gasoline fumes was stronger on this floor. He found himself walking on tiptoe. Then he smiled at his own jumpiness and stepped out quite boldly onto the third landing.

The door on the third floor was wide open. He walked into the long, barren, low-ceilinged room. The lights of the city, reflected dimly from the overcast sky, came faintly through three windows at one end. Sleet was streaking the panes with cold, ghostly fingers. There were

cobwebs in the corners of the windows.

The dim glow from the windows was barely enough to give spectral outlines to the array of crates and packing cases piled on the floor. Collins found a dry match and struck it. The flame revealed only more boxes, extending beyond the ring of light. Almost at his feet was what appeared to be a pile of rags. Collins stooped, fingered the rags. They were lace! His thoughts jumped back to a few nights previous, when Mayor Mike in Shantytown had told him that Handsome Hartford sold lace in Fourteenth Street.

The match went out.

This was indeed a strange place that June Lawn had picked to meet him in. She wasn't here yet, of course. He called her name—just to make sure. The sound of his own voice in the darkness startled him. There was no reply.

COLLINS had a sudden, uncanny impression that he was not alone in the room. As he stood listening, he could detect no specific sound that would indicate another's presence, yet he was almost certain that there was another living being somewhere in the darkness. He walked a few steps among the packing cases, deliberately making plenty of noise with his heels. Again he stopped to listen.

This time he heard a door close. It appeared to be the door at the foot of the stairway. He heard some one coming up the stairs. The footsteps were light.

He walked quickly back to the door opening on the landing. This time he was walking on his tiptoes again. The footsteps continued to climb. They were light steps. He peered around the corner of the door, but could not see who was

climbing in the darkness. He called: "June."

A shadow on the landing materialized as June Lawn.

"Phil! Then you really are here?"

"You knew I'd be, didn't you?"

Collins led her off the landing into the room full of packing cases.

"I didn't know. This is such a strange place——"

"It is a funny place," said Collins.

"Do you smell gasoline?"

"I did a moment ago. It's probably that celluloid collar factory on the floor below."

"You seem to know all about this building," said Collins.

"I ought to, although I've never been here before. This is the loft building that Mr. Wight owns," said the girl.

"It is?"

"Yes. Didn't you know that?"

"No."

"Then how did you happen to come here?"

"I came because I knew you'd be here," said Collins.

"But you were the one who left this address with that man in Shantytown," protested the girl.

"I never heard of this address till Spig gave it to me this evening. He said you'd given it to him."

"You? Something's wrong. Who is Spig? Why did he send us both here?" asked the girl.

Yes, something very definitely was wrong. It was Spig. Mayor Mike had told him to listen twice to anything Spig said. What was Spig's idea, anyhow?

"We'd better get out of here," said Collins.

June Lawn suddenly clutched his arm.

"What's that?" she whispered.

"I smell smoke," Collins replied.

"No. I heard something. Don't you hear it?"

Collins listened. He heard a dry, rustling sound, like the faint snapping of twigs.

"Sounds like a fire crackling," he said, "or rats."

"I heard a groan," the girl insisted. "A man groaning, back there in the dark among those boxes."

Again Collins listened. He heard no groan, but he heard the same crackling and snapping he had noticed a few seconds before. It was louder now, and the rustle had grown to a steady hissing murmur, like the sound made by a fire being sucked up a chimney by a strong draft. There was no mistaking the smell of smoke. Collins turned his head.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Look!"

The wall beyond the landing was aglow with a ruddy, flickering light—the mottled reflection of flames.

"Quick!" said Collins. "We——"

His words were interrupted by two loud explosions in rapid succession. There followed a brief frantic scampering of feet on the stairway. A door slammed.

"What was that?" demanded June Lawn in a terrified whisper.

"Shots," said Collins. "In the stairway."

"Who——"

"Stay here. I'll be right back to get you."

Collins ran to the door. As he stepped out on the landing, a scorching breath of hot air swept up from below. Flames choked the lower part of the stairway.

Collins blinked at the glare of the fire, shaded his eyes from the heat, and peered down the stairs. On the floor of the second landing a man's forearm protruded from the half-open door. The hand lay palm upward, the curled fingers stiff and motionless.

CHAPTER XVII.

SMOKED OUT.

COLLINS ran down a few steps. He could not see to whom the hand belonged. The man's head and body were hidden behind the door.

Collins stopped. He could go no farther. The heat from the flames that were slowly advancing up the stairway with a dull, greedy roar, was intense. Clouds of acrid smoke were rolling out of the doorway in which the unknown man was lying. The smoke billowed up into the stairway as into a chimney. Collins was seized with a fit of coughing. His eyes filled with tears. It was no use. He would have to retreat. He would probably be of no use to the man in the doorway, anyhow. The two shots had doubtless done for him. He must be dead.

June Lawn was waiting on the landing. The glare of the fire lighted her anxious, frightened face.

"We can't get out this way," said Collins. He didn't mention the man's hand. If the girl had not seen it, there was no use adding to her terror now.

"There's no fire escape at the back windows," said the girl. "I looked. What'll we do?"

"How about the front of the building?"

"I think there's a fire escape there, but I'm not sure this room runs through to the front."

"We'll try it," said Collins.

There was a tinkle of falling glass. The room was suddenly brightly illuminated. The fire had broken through the windows on the floor below and streamers of flame were twisting skyward.

Collins pushed the girl before him, as he threaded his way through the labyrinth of packing cases. They

had gone about twenty paces when the girl drew back abruptly into Collins's arms. She screamed. Collins felt his scalp crawl.

He looked down. Two feet were sticking out from behind a packing case. Was this another dead man? No, because the feet moved. By the glow of the fire Collins saw a pair of spats hiding the disreputable tops of well-worn shoes.

"Hartford!" he exclaimed.

He hurried around the box and stooped over. Handsome Hartford was lying on the floor, bound and gagged. Collins pulled a wad of lace from Hartford's mouth. Hartford gasped. Collins started to work on the ropes that tied his hands.

"What happened, Handsome?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Hartford dully. "I was sitting here, waiting for Isabel to come back. It was dark. Somebody came up behind me and hit me over the head. I just came to a little while ago. I was hog-tied——"

Collins was having trouble with the knots. June Lawn was helping him. The floor was hot, and smoke was oozing up through the cracks in murky spirals. The glare in the doorway was very bright now.

"Does this room run through to the front?" asked Collins.

"No," said Hartford. "What's the matter? Why is it so hot in here?"

"The building's on fire," said Collins. He loosened the last knot, jerked the rope free, and pulled Hartford to his feet. "Come on," he said. "We'll try to make the roof. It's our only chance."

Hartford was wobbly on his feet. Collins and the girl supported him on either side, hurried him to the stairway. The roaring flames were eating into the third landing when they reached it. They pulled Hart-

ford through the lurid fringe of fire, stumbled with him into the stairway, started climbing into the hot, choking smoke. Collins heard sirens outside. The fire department was coming.

"Bend over," gasped Collins. "Walk low. You can breathe better."

They plunged blindly upward two flights, three flights, coughing and gasping. Collins's lungs were burning, and tears streamed from his aching eyes. He felt Hartford suddenly pull back.

"I forgot something," gasped Hartford. "I left my hat down there."

"Come on," ordered Collins. Hartford stumbled on obediently.

One more flight; but it seemed to take a year before Collins, groping in the smoke, found the door to the roof. He kicked it open. The two men and the girl staggered out into the snowy night.

COLLINS turned his face upward to the cold caress of the driving sleet. He filled his lungs with fresh, freezing air. He heard men shouting above the sounds of bells and sirens in the street.

"There's a fire escape at the front," panted Hartford.

"I'm going to look," announced Collins. "Don't move before I tell you."

The flat, wet roof was beginning to steam as he ran over it toward the street. He reached the low parapet, put his head over, drew it back quickly. Flames were leaping from the front windows, surging upward over the façade of the building. The mounting smoke and heat scorched Collins's face. The smoke increased as a pounding stream of water from the first nozzle ripped against the blazing structure, smashing windows.

Through a break in the smoke screen, Collins saw firemen dragging more fat hoses across the street. He saw a crew raising an extension ladder. He heard the rhythmic beat of pumps, the screeching sirens of more fire apparatus arriving. He heard a man bellowing. Was it a trick of his imagination, or was the man bellowing his name? He squinted through the smoke, peered down again. He saw a green police car parked among the red fire trucks six stories below. Then he recognized Lieutenant Hoag.

Hoag was looking upward. He had a revolver in his hand and was making threatening gestures as he bellowed something to the man on the roof. Collins did not understand the words, but he understood the sense. He drew away from the parapet and started back to the rear of the roof where June Lawn and Handsome Hartford were waiting.

Rescue by firemen was out of the question now. Hoag already suspected him of a hand in the Daggett murder. If the body of the man on the second landing was found by the firemen before the flames destroyed it completely, Collins would be again incriminated. Even if they found only a charred skeleton, he would undoubtedly be accused—particularly as he could not tell who the man was.

"You folks go to the front and try to get down the fire escape," said Collins. "The firemen will help you."

"And you?" asked June Lawn.

"The cops are down there," said Collins. "I saw Hoag. He recognized me. I'm going to try to stay clear."

"We'll stay with you," said the girl.

"Sure," said Hartford. "Let's get away over the roofs."

THE roof of the adjoining building was a story higher. Collins climbed on Hartford's shoulders, got his fingers over the edge of a cornice, pulled himself up. Hartford boosted the girl into Collins's arms, then helped himself by digging his toes into the bricks while Collins, leaning down, gripped his wrists and slowly raised him. For half a block they made their way among the water tanks, chimneys, and skylights of roofs of the same level. Then they came to a two-story drop.

"Looks like we're licked," said Hartford.

"If we could get around the corner into the next street," said Collins, "maybe Hoag hasn't had time to get enough reinforcements to surround the block."

"There's a flagpole," said Hartford. "Why not——"

But Collins had seen the pole, too. He was already unwinding the rope from behind the cleat. Hartford cut through a knot. Collins pulled the loose end through the pulley at the top of the pole.

Collins made one end of the rope fast around a vent pipe sticking out of the roof. He looped the other end under June's arms and lowered her to the roof of the next building, twenty feet below. Collins and Hartford went down the rope, hand over hand.

The building they were on now did not face on Greene Street. Collins went to the parapet and looked over. There was not even a fire truck in the side street. The excitement still centered around the corner. Now to get down.

"There's a fire escape over here," called June softly. "It goes down into a little alley."

Collins ran along the wet roof to join her. He had gone a dozen steps

when he heard a crash behind him. He turned. Handsome Hartford was gone. A broken skylight gaped near by. Collins ran over, peered down through the broken panes. He called:

"You hurt, Hartford?"

"I'm all right," came Hartford's voice from the darkness. "I slipped on the wet roof. Lucky. I only dropped one floor. I—I'm not hurt."

"Can you get back up?" asked Collins. "Shall I get a piece of that rope?"

June Lawn was at his side, peering into the broken skylight.

"Don't stop to help me," said Hartford. "It'll take too long. You two go on without me. I'm all right. I'll get out through the building."

"Try to reach my hand, Handsome."

"Go on—don't wait!" called Hartford. "I'll make it all right. We'd have had to separate anyhow."

Hartford was right. There was no time to lose. In another minute or two the neighborhood would be swarming with police. "Good luck, Handsome."

Collins led the girl to the fire escape. As they started down the ladderlike iron stairs, Collins heard renewed moaning of sirens. He wondered of it was more fire apparatus responding to another alarm, or police cars, summoned by Lieutenant Hoag. June's heels clicked on the metallic rungs as they climbed down.

The fire escape ended on a platform one story from the ground. Collins swung himself over and dropped. June jumped. Collins caught her in his arms. As he let her feet slip down to the pavement, he felt his arm seized. He turned his head.

A man was standing beside him. The man wore a light-colored overcoat pinched sharply at the waist.

Melted snow was dripping off his gray slouch hat. He did not release his hold on Collins's arm.

"Evening," said the man. "I was waiting for you folks. Let's take a little walk."

Collins felt his heart pounding.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I'll tell you later, maybe," said the man in the slouch hat. "Come on."

Collins held back. Something about this man, something furtive, told him that he was not one of Hoag's men. He did not act like a policeman.

"What authority——" Collins began.

"This!" the man announced. Something metallic gleamed in his free hand. "Walk, now, and walk fast. You, too, girlie. Move!"

Collins, bewildered, started down the alley. He felt the muzzle of a revolver poking him in the small of the back.

"Faster!" said the man.

Collins and the girl obeyed.

Half a block away, around the corner, luminous, saffron-colored clouds were still pouring into the sky from the burning loft building.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FAMILIAR FACE.

WHEN Rustaff left, Jim North went into the closet that his optimistic landlord called a kitchenette and poured himself a drink. Gulping it down, he poured another; the night was cold, and he was going out. He had told Rustaff he was staying home, but he had no intention of sitting around, twiddling his thumbs, until Arthur Bendick should return at twelve thirty. North would be back at twelve thirty to receive Bendick and his "inside story" of course, but in

the meantime he was consumed with an overpowering curiosity on the subject of the telephone call Bendick had received at his apartment. Something, quite obviously, was on the verge of happening. And since the telephone call had been made from Waverly Place and Greene Street, only a few blocks from North's apartment, he decided to saunter over that way. Perhaps he could pick up a description of the person who made the call.

North walked across Washington Square and turned into Waverly Place. A block ahead he saw the lights of a store front reflected on the wet sidewalk—probably the place he was seeking. Approaching, he saw it was a drug store. As he entered, he noticed casually that a big limousine was stopped beyond the corner on the other side of the street.

"Yes, sir?" said the sleepy clerk expectantly.

North did not reply. He was looking over the clerk's shoulder, looking beyond a display of cough medicine and hot-water bottles, through the window. He saw a man get out of the limousine and walk rapidly down the street. The man was wearing a soft felt hat of pearl gray and a light-colored overcoat pinched sharply at the waist—inappropriate costume for a cold, wet night, North thought. He had had only a brief glimpse of the man's face—a dark, rather handsome face—but there was something decidedly familiar about it.

"What can I do for you, sir?" asked the clerk again.

"Gimme two nickels for a dime," said North. "I want to phone."

"Please don't talk too long, sir," said the clerk. "It's midnight. We're closing."

North paused at the entrance to

the telephone booth, frowning. He didn't want to telephone. He wanted to remember where he had seen the man in the pearl-gray hat. Suddenly he swore violently and dashed from the drug store.

Monzello! Frank Monzello, the fish-market racketeer. That's who it was. North had seen Monzello only once, for a very short time several months ago, but he was certain that this man was Monzello. What was Monzello doing in Greenwich Village? What was he doing, as a matter of fact, in New York? Bendick had said he was on the schooner *Spray* and was not due back until to-morrow morning. Bendick must be lying. But would Bendick lie and jeopardize the five thousand dollars that he was obviously planning to use to make a get-away?

North reached the corner. The limousine was gone. He looked down Waverly Place toward the Square, then toward Broadway. Monzello had vanished. There was no one in sight in Greene Street in either direction. North hesitated. It seemed a hopeless task, hunting a man alone when he wasn't even sure where he had vanished. It was a shame to let Hoag in on this, but that seemed the only thing to do. He ran back to the drug store.

The clerk was putting out the lights. The door was locked. North pounded on the glass. The clerk formed silent words with his lips to the effect that the store was closed. North made signs with his foot that he intended to kick the glass out of the door. The clerk opened. North bounded into the telephone booth and called Hoag.

"Vincent," he said, "I've just seen Frank Monzello."

"You're drunk, North," said Hoag.

"All right," said North, "if you don't want to——"

"Wait. Don't hang up, North," said Hoag. "Where'd you see him?"

North told him.

"I'll be right down," said Hoag.

North hung up the receiver and walked out of the store. The clerk appeared greatly relieved.

NORTH went to the corner and looked in all directions. It would be five, perhaps ten minutes, before Hoag showed up—too long to stand on a street corner on a night as cold as this. North knew of a speakeasy just across the way in Washington Square. He would have time for one drink before Hoag showed up. He pulled his hat down and started walking.

Just before he reached the Square, he stopped short. He heard two sharp explosions, like two pistol shots, in quick succession. The reports had come from behind him—from the direction of Greene Street. He turned and retraced his steps, half running, past the drug store, now dark, to the corner.

He looked up and down Greene Street. He saw no one. He walked quickly in one direction for half a block, decided he was wrong, walked a block in the other direction. Again he was about to stop when he saw a flickering, lurid light shining in a driveway. He turned in. Across a small courtyard, he saw flames dancing madly in a second-story window. He ran to the door of the building, tried to open it. It was locked.

He hurried back to the corner and turned in a fire alarm.

Half a minute later Lieutenant Hoag drove up.

North told Hoag what he had seen and heard—carefully omitting the prelude of Bendick's visit, and the dialogue with Rustaff on the stairs. These were two angles which he could use to his own advantage later.

"So you think the shots came from inside there?" said Hoag, as North hurried him to the burning loft building.

"That's my guess," said North.

"Here's the fire wagons," said Hoag, as the first trucks screeched to a stop outside in Greene Street, disgorging squads of men in rubber helmets. While the first hoses were being unreeled, Hoag got hold of a battalion chief.

"Can you send anybody inside, Ed?" asked Hoag.

The battalion chief, stopping in the driveway, appraised the headway made by the blaze. He shook his head.

"Dangerous," he said. "And useless. There's nobody in a loft building at this time of night."

"There might be," said Hoag. "I want to make sure."

"Well——" began the battalion chief. He turned his head to shout an order. Fire axes smashed through the door on the far side of the courtyard. Six men dragged a squirming nozzle across the sidewalk, through the arch. A battering-ram of water leaped roaring into the flaming stairway. Hissing clouds of smoke rolled out, driving Hoag and North back to the street.

More nozzles were coming into play. Two men with gas masks and hand extinguishers ran into the driveway. The beams of their flashlights crisscrossed in the heavy smoke as they moved toward the door of the stairway.

HOAG was standing in the street looking up. Suddenly he dug his elbow into North's ribs.

"There he is!" he exclaimed.

"Who?" asked North.

"The bird I been looking for," said Hoag, drawing his gun.

Through a rift in the smoke screen, the face of Phil Collins was clearly visible, peering over the parapet of the roof.

"Collins!" bellowed Hoag. "Collins! Come on down that fire escape, or I'll plug you!"

Collins promptly disappeared.

Hoag ran across the street. He wanted to go up the fire escape, up the extension ladder that was being raised against the front of the building. The battalion chief would hear of no such foolhardy behavior. Climbing around on burning buildings is reserved exclusively for members of the fire department.

Then the two firemen wearing gas masks reëmerged from the smoke-filled stairway. One of them was staggering under a heavy burden—the inert figure of a man slung across his shoulders. He made his way toward the street, deposited his burden face down on the wet sidewalk, and snatched off his gas mask. North and Hoag were beside him. The body, clad in charred rags, was discolored and steaming.

"Looks like he's done for," said the fireman. "He's burned bad. We found him on the second-floor landing. Probably overcome by the smoke."

"Smoke, hell!" exclaimed Hoag, a flashlight in his hand. "He's been shot. Look here!" The luminous disk of his flashlight encircled two gory wounds at the back of the man's skull. Bullets had torn into the base of the brain.

"Flop him over," said North. "Let's see who——"

The fireman raised the body and turned it over. Hoag's light explored the dead man's features.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed North, as he recognized the contorted face. "Bendick!"

A succession of pictures flashed

through North's mind. He saw Frank Monzello getting out of a limousine and walking rapidly down Greene Street a few moments before he heard the shots that must have killed Bendick. He saw Louis Rustaff standing in a darkened hallway just outside North's door while Bendick, inside, was bargaining to sell the "inside" story of the Daggett murder for five thousand dollars. And, looking down again, he saw Bendick dead!

He heard Lieutenant Hoag shout-
ing orders.

"Phone headquarters," the lieutenant was telling the uniformed policeman who had come with him. "Get me fifty men. Get me another fifty—or all they can spare—from the Mercer Street station. Get 'em quick. I'm going to search every building in six blocks. I'll be damned if this Collins is going to get away from me this time."

CHAPTER XIX. PRISONERS.

THE man in the pearl-gray hat herded Collins and June Lawn to the end of the alley, then suddenly extended his arm and brushed them back. A police car whizzed by, siren screaming.

June Lawn gave a little cry, but the sound was lost in the howl of the siren.

The man in the pearl-gray hat administered a smack to the girl's mouth with the back of his hand.

A movement of resentment from Collins brought a sharp jab in the pit of the stomach with the muzzle of the man's revolver.

The police car swung around the corner into Greene Street.

"Run!" ordered the man in an undertone. "And don't make me shoot off no guns."

They ran down the street, around the corner away from the fire, with the menace of the man with the revolver one pace behind them. Straight ahead was the trestle of the elevated, turning out of Third Street. Under the trestle a big limousine was waiting, the engine running.

"Get in!" ordered the man in the pearl-gray hat.

They obeyed. The man got in after them and sat on one of the jump seats, facing them, with his revolver on one knee.

Without another word, the limousine started. The chauffeur had evidently been given previous orders. The car sped down West Broadway under the elevated trestle, weaving in and out among the steel pillars for a few blocks, then darting eastward into a side street.

"I guess you folks never heard of Frank Monzello," said the man with the revolver.

There was a brief silence. Then June Lawn said:

"I've never heard anything good about him."

The man chuckled in the darkness.

"Just remember that, girlie," he said, "next time you feel like screaming."

"You're Monzello?"

"You're a good guesser, girlie, as well as a good-looker."

"What do you want with us?" demanded Collins.

Monzello chuckled again.

"You'll find out, buddy," he said. "There's no hurry. We got half the night ahead of us, and the nights is getting pretty long now."

The limousine was threading the streets of the lower East Side, passing the ramp of the Williamsburg Bridge, then the Manhattan Bridge. It stopped in a poverty-stricken

neighborhood that was in distinct contrast to the gleaming magnificence of the sleek automobile. The chauffeur stuck his head out, looked up and down the street, then got out and opened the door.

"Hop!" ordered Monzello. "And don't forget, girlie, that my trigger finger gets twitchy when anybody screams or makes a fuss."

He marched Collins and the girl up one flight of steps at the point of his gun.

"When will you want the car again, sir?" called the chauffeur from the foot of the stairs.

"Have it outside to-morrow night at eleven, unless you hear from me in the meantime," said Monzello. "Just leave it. I'll drive it myself. You can pick it up again at the dock at midnight."

Monzello kicked at the door. A small panel opened at the height of his eyes. A woman's face appeared, then vanished. The door opened. Monzello pushed Collins and June Lawn ahead of him into the room. The door slammed shut with a metallic clang. Collins noted that the inside of the door was armored with a thin plate of steel.

"What's this you are bringing home?" demanded the woman in a bored, disagreeable voice. Her face, heavily enameled in an attempt to hide the advance of middle age, still showed substantial remains of a certain hard beauty. Her blond hair was dark at the roots.

"Just friends," said Monzello. "Go on to bed while I talk to 'em."

The blonde looked at June Lawn.

"Talk, if you want," she said. "But I ain't going to bed. I'm staying right here."

Monzello shrugged. From an ornate box he extracted a long, Russian cigarette that smelled sweetly of amber. As he bent his head to

light it, the flame glinted on his dark, burnished hair. The blonde sat down sullenly at a table and resumed a game of solitaire she had been playing when Monzello came in.

COLLINS looked around the room at the furnishings of outmoded elegance—at red plush furniture, a big gilt-framed mirror over the marble mantelpiece, a big clock surmounted by bronze nymphs.

"Fix us a drink," said Monzello. "It's a cold night."

"Fix it yourself," said the blonde without looking up from her cards.

Monzello produced a bottle and three glasses.

"Let's get down to business, Monzello," said Collins suddenly. "What do you want with us?"

Monzello ignored the question. He pushed a glass toward June Lawn.

"How about you, girlie?" he asked. "It's a cold night."

"None for me," said the girl.

Monzello's heavy eyelids closed, then slowly opened. He poured himself a stiff drink of whisky, gulped it. Collins came close to him.

"Monzello, if you don't—"

"Just what'll you do?" asked Monzello, putting down his glass. Collins met the challenge of his gaze without blinking.

"Sit down," said Monzello, "and I'll tell you the story. I was watching you two, coming over the roofs down in Greene Street after the fire started, and I figured you must have seen some interesting things in that old loft building. What was you two doing in that building, anyhow, that you had to run away over the roofs?"

"None of your business," said Collins.

"Never mind," said Monzello. "I got ways of making you answer in case I really want to. But all I want to know is how much you saw of the murder?"

"Murder?" June Lawn looked at Collins. "We heard shots, but we didn't see any murder."

"That's fine, girlie," said Monzello. "Murder ain't a nice thing for a girl like you to see. But as far as I'm concerned you saw it, all right, and you're going to write down just what you saw—like I tell it to you."

"We didn't see a thing," said Collins.

"I guess you know," said Monzello, bringing pen, ink, and paper out of a drawer, "that the building you was in belongs to a man named Wight—William Wight."

"Yes," admitted June Lawn.

"And, of course, you know what Wight looks like?"

The girl nodded.

"You, too, bud?"

"I've seen him," said Collins.

"Fine," said Monzello, dipping the pen into the inkwell. "Now you just write how you saw William Wight shoot a man named Bendick while you was in that loft building."

"But we didn't see any such thing," protested the girl.

"Maybe you don't know Bendick. Then just write you saw Wight shoot a man of such-and-such description. I'll tell you what Bendick looked like."

"For all I know, Wight wasn't anywhere near Greene Street to-night," said the girl.

"That don't make no difference. You just write what I tell you. I'll get a notary to make an affidavit out of it, and maybe you won't even have to swear it in court."

"You can't make us swear to anything we didn't see," said Collins.

Monzello poured himself another drink.

"You was seen in or about that loft building," said Monzello, narrowing his eyes, "or you wouldn't have been in such a hurry to get away. Did the cops see you?"

Collins did not reply.

"They did," said Monzello, smiling at his cigarette. "The cops saw you. Fine. Then your story'll stand up as an eye-witness account—"

"We're not going to perjure ourselves," Collins announced.

"Sorry, bud," said Monzello, "but that's the way it is. You're going to write just what I tell you."

"And if I don't?"

"You'll stay here till you do," said Monzello. "Both of you. And I got ways and means of changing your mind."

COLLINS yawned and stood up. "Better show us where we sleep," he said. "I have an idea we'll be here for some days."

"All right, if you want to sleep over it," said Monzello. "You'll think better in the morning. You can sleep in here, buddy."

He walked to a door and threw it open.

"And as for you, girlie—" Monzello stepped up to June Lawn and stood looking down at her.

June stood up, facing Monzello. Monzello caught her in his arms, then released her suddenly. He stepped back, blood oozing from a long scratch on his cheek.

The blonde who had opened the door for them was watching, with a playing card poised in mid-air between two fingers.

"Leave her alone, Frank," she drawled. "You're too old for that."

Monzello was patting his wounded cheek with a silk handkerchief. His eyes were blazing.

"All right," he said, his voice tight with anger, "then you'll both sleep in there."

"But I want to sleep alone," protested June. "I——"

"You'll sleep where I tell you," snapped Monzello.

Abruptly he picked up the girl in his arms, carried her, struggling, through the door, and flung her on the bed. He turned. Collins was advancing on him, fists clenched.

Monzello flashed his gun.

"Get in there," he ordered.

"You——"

"Get in there."

Collins looked over Monzello's shoulder. The bored blonde had resumed her game of solitaire and was no longer watching. Collins backed into the bedroom. Monzello pulled the door closed with a bang and locked it.

Collins groped for the light, switched it on. June was lying on the bed where she had fallen, sobbing. Collins went to the only window in the room, tugged at it. The window went up with a screech. He put his hand out. His fingers touched the freezing cold of metal. Iron shutters were closed over the outside of the window, and fastened with a chain and padlock. They were prisoners for certain.

He went back to the girl sobbing on the bed, and touched her timidly on the shoulder.

"Don't worry," he said. "It isn't that bad."

The girl looked at him and tried to smile.

"I'm sorry," she said. "This is stupid of me, but——"

"Good night," said Collins.

He took off his coat, rolled it into a semblance of a pillow, and lay down on the floor. It was cold. He pulled a rug over him. The rug was dusty. He sneezed. He was too ex-

cited to sleep, anyhow. He lay awake, thinking, listening.

After a while he heard Monzello's voice in the next room. Monzello was evidently talking on the telephone. Collins made out snatches of the one-sided conversation:

"—better come through. . . . You can tell him that I've got two witnesses who'll swear he was the one that killed Bendick. . . . Sure, tell him they were seen near the crime, so there'll be no question about 'em being eye-witnesses. . . . No, he won't get to 'em. He can't. Anyhow, I'm going to keep 'em in a safe place. . . . Yeah, I'm taking 'em to sea. . . . The *Spray*, to-morrow night. . . . O. K., call me during the day. By."

Collins heard the click of the receiver being replaced. He heard the drawling voice of the blonde complaining about something. Then followed a long silence, broken only by the soft sound of the snow falling against the iron shutters.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MORGUE REVISITED.

DARK circles appeared under the eyes of Lieutenant Vincent Hoag. He had been up most of the night and he had accomplished little. He was as far as ever from the solution of the murder of Harry Daggett. The murder of Arthur Bendick in the Greene Street loft building the night before had eliminated one of the suspects, but had not helped clear up the original mystery, as Hoag had hoped it might. There were clues, but they were conflicting.

There was the business of Frank Monzello being seen in Greene Street by North, just before the fatal shots were fired. That would be simple enough were it not compli-

cated by that brief view of Phil Collins on the roof of the burning building. What was Collins doing there, anyhow, if Monzello killed Bendick? And this man Hartford, too.

Hoag's men had found Hartford lying on the top floor of a building half a block from the fire, white-lipped with the pain of a broken ankle. He had fallen through a skylight, obviously while trying to get away over the roofs. Hoag had gone to Bellevue Hospital, where Hartford was taken, and had questioned him for an hour. He had gotten only incoherent answers—deliberately incoherent, Hoag suspected. He was sure that he could break Hartford down in the end, but the doctors wouldn't let him talk any more. Patient was in no condition for further questioning at present.

Then there was this fact of the loft building belonging to William Wight. Lieutenant Hoag refused to accept this as a mere coincidence. He had gone to Vandoria Apartments at three in the morning, after the deputy fire marshal had notified him that the building was Wight's. He had gotten Wight out of bed. Strange-looking man, with his long white hair sticking out in all directions, and his bushy black eyebrows. Wight seemed very much upset, more by the murder than by the fire. He could understand the fire—if Hoag had seen Collins on the roof of the building. Collins blamed Wight for losing him his job at the Vandoria Apartments. He also resented Wight's interfering in his romance with June Lawn. Quite probably Collins, who doubtless knew from June Lawn that Wight owned 101½ Greene Street, had set it ablaze from sheer spite. But the murder—Wight was nonplused. He did not even know Bendick.

As for the Widow Daggett, she

had been in custody for twenty-four hours, without being of the slightest help. She was stupid or afraid.

Lieutenant Hoag heaved a puzzled sigh, clasped his hands in front of his ample stomach, and put his feet up on his desk. Then his telephone bell rang. It was the desk sergeant calling. A taxi driver had something to say about the Daggett murder.

"Send him up," said Hoag.

The taxi driver was a small, spindly-legged man with dark jowls and a long nose. He played nervously with his cap as he spoke.

"I been readin' about this Daggett murder in the papers," he said, "and I guess maybe I should 'a' come around before, but—well, in the first place I wasn't quite sure, and in the second place I was kind of scared of losin' my hackin' badge on account of gettin' mixed up in a mess like this, even if it wasn't my fault. Last night I talked it over with the old lady and she says, sure, I should tell you everythin' I know."

"What do you know?" asked Hoag, leaning back in his chair.

"First of all, is this bird Daggett buried yet?"

"Not yet," said Hoag. "The widow wanted to bury him herself, but there's some hitch about the insurance money, so we're planting him in potter's field for the time being. There's a boat load of stiff's going up to the island to-morrow. Daggett's in the morgue till then."

"Can I go over and look at him?" asked the taxi driver.

"We'll go together," Hoag replied.

TEN minutes later Hoag and the taxi driver were walking down the silent aisles of the morgue, stepping softly between the row after row of still, sheeted forms. An odor of death mingled with the

heavy smell of disinfectant. They stopped in front of one slab, while an attendant drew back the covering from Harry Daggett's body. The taxi driver stared down for fully half a minute, as though fascinated by the greenish pallor of the dead face. At last he said in a strangled voice

"That's him."

"Know him?" asked Hoag, who had been watching every change in the taxi driver's expression.

"No," said the taxi driver, "but I drove him—the night he was killed."

"Where'd you drive him to?" demanded Hoag.

"Let's get outa here," said the taxi driver. "This place gives me the jitters."

The attendant drew the covering back over Daggett's corpse. Hoag and the taxi driver left the morgue.

"Where'd you drive him to?" repeated Hoag, as the two men were seated in the car, returning to police headquarters.

"I'll start at the beginnin'," said the taxi driver. "I just put down a sailor in South Street, and I'm cruisin' back up through the East Side to my regular stand——"

"When was this?" asked Hoag.

"Tuesday night. And a fellow comes out to the curb and hails me. He gives me a fat envelope in one hand and a ten-spot in the other. 'Listen what I tell you,' he says. 'Your clock won't run up more'n two-three bucks, so there's a juicy tip in it for you. But don't try to cross me, because I got the number of your hack badge——'"

"What sort of looking man was this?" interrupted Hoag.

"All I remember is he was dark and dressed pretty snappy," continued the taxi driver. "Had on a light-gray hat. 'Deliver this envelope,' he says, 'pick up the pas-

senger they'll turn over to you, and bring him down to the entrance to the Fulton Street docks.' Well, I'm damned if that envelope ain't stuffed with hundred-dollar bills, I finds out when I delivers it. It's bail for this fellow Daggett—the same guy I just see in the morgue. He's the passenger I picked up."

"And you took him to Fulton Street dock?"

"Not right off. This fellow Daggett insists on makin' a stop on the way. I'm a little nervous on account of him just gettin' outa jail, so I don't argue. I stops. It's the office of a bail-bond broker——"

"Louis Rustaff?"

"That's the name on the window."

"A short, plump man, kind of bald?"

"That's him. Well, I gets outa the cab and looks through the window. I see Daggett talkin', kind of excited, to Rustaff, only I can't see Rustaff very well on account he's part hid behind a screen. They talks for about five minutes. Then Rustaff comes out alone. 'Who told you to bring this man here?' he asks. 'He told me hisself,' I says. 'I'm supposed to take him to the Fulton Street docks. Tell him to come out. I'm in a hurry,' I says. Well, Rustaff goes back and him and Daggett argues about five minutes more. Then Daggett comes out and gets in the cab. 'Drive to the Vandoria Apartments next,' he says. Well, I don't want to get in bad with the guy that give me the ten bucks, since he got my number, and at the same time I don't want no argument with this guy Daggett that just got outa jail. So I says, 'All right.' Only I don't drive to the Vandoria; I drive to the Fulton Street dock, like I'm supposed to. 'Far as I go,' I says, when we get to the dock. 'You'll have to get another hack if

you want to go to the Vandoria.' Well, Daggett's kind of sore, but he gets out——"

"Was the man in the gray hat waiting for him?" asked Hoag.

"I don't see nobody around," said the taxi driver. "The last I see of Daggett, he's walking down the dock, kind of talkin' to hisself."

"And you didn't see him again?"

"Not till just now in the morgue. I forgot to tell you, though, that just as I'm drivin' away from this Rustaff's office, I notice the lights go out. I looks back, and I sees Rustaff come out, run down the street in the opposite direction and hop in a cab."

"Did he follow you?"

"I ain't sure. I didn't notice."

The police car stopped in front of headquarters.

"Come on upstairs," said Lieutenant Hoag. "I want to talk to you some more."

In Hoag's anteroom, Detective Hill was waiting. Hill was possessed of two virtues which, to a police detective, are more valuable than intelligence: Good legs and the patience to run down clues by the dogged process of exhaustive elimination.

"I traced that hat, lieutenant," said Detective Hill proudly.

"What hat?" asked Hoag, his mind filled with what he had just learned from the taxi driver.

"That battered derby you found floating near the *Laughing Girl* when Daggett's body was discovered," said the detective.

"Who's is it?" asked Hoag.

"Took me two days to run it down," said Detective Hill. "I started at the factory in Norwalk, traced it through the wholesaler, jobber, and retailer——"

"Whose hat was it?" Hoag demanded.

"It belonged to Louis Rustaff," said the detective.

CHAPTER XXI. CLEW IN BROOKLYN.

A LIGHT snow had been falling all day. Roofs, elevated railway stations, and the tops of street cars were white, but on the ground the snow had melted to a dirty slush. Some of it clung to Jim North's shoes, whereupon Hoag objected to the reporter putting his feet on his official desk. It was eight o'clock Friday evening and the first time that North had seen Hoag since the murder in Greene Street the night before.

"This is Friday, Vincent," said North. "I want to start on my vacation to-morrow night. Are we going to get the Daggett murder solved and off of page one?"

Lieutenant Hoag begged the question.

"I see where that cheap sheet of yours is offering a thousand dollars reward for the arrest of Frank Monzello," said Hoag.

"I thought you never read the *Tabloid*, Vincent?"

"I don't. Somebody told me."

"Well, Monzello was in town last night, all right," said North. "I checked at the Fulton Street docks this morning when the *Spray* came in. The skipper of the *Spray* says Monzello forced his way aboard at the point of a pistol, and then used the same argument to get himself transferred at sea to a schooner due back in port yesterday morning."

"Think he came back to kill Bendick?"

"Maybe," said North.

"Whatever he came back for," said Hoag, "you can figure on paying that thousand to somebody in the police department."

"Got Monzello cornered, Vincent?"

"Not exactly," said Hoag, "but we got a tip to-day about the automobile he drives. We got a description and license number. The boys are combing the garages, and the number's gone out over the State police tickers here and in Jersey. I'll probably have news on it before long."

"Probably not," said North, "unless you do better than you're doing on Louis Rustaff."

"What about Rustaff?"

"Can't find him, can you, Vincent?"

"Who said I was looking for Rustaff?"

"You got new warrants out for him, charging murder and conspiracy. You didn't expect to keep that a secret, did you?"

"I suppose you know where he is," said Hoag deprecatingly.

"I know where he isn't," said North. "I know his office has been locked up tighter than a drum all day."

"What else you know?"

"I might tell you," said North, "if you told me on what information you got those new warrants issued for Rustaff to-day?"

"Can't," said Hoag. "Confidential information."

"My information's confidential, too," said North. He got up and reached for the lieutenant's box of cigars, but Hoag pushed his drawer shut just in time. North nonchalantly lighted one of his own cigarettes. "I'll be seeing you, Vincent," he said, as he sauntered toward the door. "Don't disappoint me on my vacation."

North went out to get something to eat. As he ate, he consulted a map of Brooklyn he had bought at a corner news stand.

He was a native New Yorker, but

he hadn't crossed the bridges to Brooklyn more than a dozen times in his life. To-night, however, he, too, was looking for Louis Rustaff. He'd been looking for him ever since he had drawn his own conclusions from Rustaff's possible eavesdropping on Bendick's dicker to sell his confession, and Bendick's murder less than an hour later. North thought he was nearer to knowing Rustaff's present whereabouts than Lieutenant Hoag was. North had spent an hour or two in friendly inquiry among Rustaff's fellow bail-bond brokers. He found them remarkably ignorant of Rustaff's movements—all except one. One broker owed North a debt of gratitude for a previous favor, and even he was remarkably cautious. He thought—he wasn't in the least sure—that Rustaff might be found in a certain street in Brooklyn. He didn't know the number. He wasn't even sure of the street. And naturally North was to forget immediately where he got this bit of meager information.

WHEN he had finished eating, North took a taxi across Brooklyn Bridge. He found the street, eventually, but it was a long street, lined with houses hopelessly alike. He drove up and down the street several times without seeing anything that might be a clue to Rustaff's hiding place. Then he dismissed the taxi and started walking. He might have a better chance on foot.

He had been walking for nearly an hour and had almost despaired of finding anything significant when he heard a dog scratching and whining at the front door of a house. As North approached, he saw the dog leave the porch and run around the side of the house. He followed, and found the dog scratching at the back

door. The dog growled, scooted between North's legs, and returned to the front porch.

Here, by the faint light from the street lamp at the corner, North thought he recognized the black cocker spaniel he had taken from the launch *Laughing Girl* the morning of the Daggett murder, nearly three days ago. It was undoubtedly a black cocker spaniel, but it was in pitiful condition—bedraggled, obviously exhausted, its paws bloody as though worn down by days of running, its tongue hanging out, its coat matted. North spoke to the animal. The dog turned, wagged its tail briefly in recognition of a familiar voice, then returned to the business of scratching at the door. Elated at having found its way home after wandering the streets for forty-eight hours, the dog was baffled by its inability to get into the house.

North picked the dog up in his arms and rang the doorbell. After a long wait, the door was opened by a Japanese butler. The Japanese looked at North, looked at the dog, then said: "Very sorry. Nobody home."

He tried to close the door, but North had his foot inside.

"Tell Mr. Rustaff," he said, "that North of the *Tabloid* wants to see him."

"Very sorry," began the Japanese. "Nobody——"

North put his shoulder against the door and forced his way in.

"Tell Mr. Rustaff," repeated North, raising his voice, "that North of the *Tabloid* is here on a friendly and unofficial visit, but that if he won't see me, I'll get the police and he'll wish he had."

"Very sorry——"

"Tell him what I told you!" roared North.

The Japanese disappeared. A moment later he was back.

"Please to come," he said.

LOUIS RUSTAFF met North with a glass in his hand. He was standing, none too steadily, behind a table strewn with ashes and cigar butts. His eyes were bloodshot, and he was apparently half drunk.

North let the dog out of his arms. The spaniel ran for Rustaff, whining, trembling, and squirming with delight, trying to jump upon him. Rustaff ignored the dog. He stared at North.

"Well?" he said.

"I thought you'd like to know, Rustaff," said North, "that there's a warrant out, charging you with conspiracy and murder."

"Moider?" At last Rustaff looked at the dog. He put down a hand to pet it. The spaniel licked his fingers eagerly. "And I suppose this dog is evidence against me—that it?"

"You'd have a hard time denying the dog was yours," said North.

"I haven't seen the dog in two months," said Rustaff.

"I know," said North. "Bendick said he was keeping him for you. At the same time, a jury might think that the dog being in the launch where Daggett was murdered indicates that you'd been there, too—particularly since Bendick is dead."

"The dog lived in the launch," said Rustaff.

"Which launch?" asked North. "There were two exactly alike."

Rustaff did not reply.

North sat down, crossed his legs, and extended a hand across the table. Rustaff remained standing.

"I'll try one of your cigars, while you're making up your mind," said North.

Rustaff pushed the box of cigars toward North.

"Why did you come here?" he demanded.

"I wanted you to tell me about Harry Daggett," said North.

"Daggett was a fool," said Rustaff.

"Tell me," said North, lighting a cigar. "You were the one who fixed it for Daggett to go to jail in place of Monzello, weren't you?"

"Why should I tell you anything?"

"Because sooner or later you're going to have to tell your story to the cops, and maybe to a jury, and if you're going to lie, it'll be good practice for you to lie to me first."

Rustaff looked down at the black spaniel curled up contentedly at his feet.

"I'll tell you the truth," he said with sudden resolution. "I swear I'll tell the truth."

"Don't strain yourself," said North. "Tell me how Monzello knew about Daggett."

"Monzello knew Daggett went to jail for Bendick," said Rustaff. "It was one of Monzello's men that Bendick beat up that time. One day Monzello came to me and said: 'Louis, I got a tip they're going to indict me for extortion, but I ain't going to jail. Get that boob Daggett to be a ringer for me. I'll pay him the same as Bendick did.'"

"What did Bendick pay him?"

"Ten dollars for every day he stayed in jail. I told Monzello he was crazy, that it wouldn't work twice. He said to take a chance, since it was a different court and, anyhow, Daggett was such a dope. Daggett was glad to make a little more easy money, so I fixed it for him to get arrested in Monzello's place. Then the judge set bail at twenty grand, and Daggett, dumb as he was, got leary. He didn't mind

going to jail for thirty days, but with a bond of twenty thousand dollars, he figured maybe he was due for a couple of years up the river and by the time he got out, he'd have a hard time collecting any money. So he sent word to me that if I didn't get him out, he was going to squeal and spill the whole works."

"So you passed on the squawk to Monzello?"

RUSTAFF hesitated. Then he said:

"That's it. I phoned Monzello, and Monzello said: 'O. K., Louis, leave it to me. I'll take care of this Daggett.' Next I know, Daggett was out on bail and come around to see me in a taxi. The dumb-bell'd got wise all of a sudden. When he saw that when he threatened to squeal, somebody quick shelled out twenty grand to get him out of the cooler, he figured that here was an easier way to make money than going to jail. He'd just keep up threatening to squeal——"

"He tried to shake you down?" asked North.

"He sure did," said Rustaff, perspiring profusely on his bald spot. "I put him off. I told him it was Monzello had the dough, and he ought to get it from Monzello. The taxi driver said that he had orders to take him to Fulton Street dock, anyway, so I pushed him off that way. That's the last I saw of him."

"And what was the last you saw of Bendick?"

Rustaff paled.

"W-who?" he stammered.

"Arthur Bendick. The man who was killed last night half an hour after he talked to me with you snooping outside the door listening."

Rustaff's lips seemed stuck to his teeth. He had difficulty in opening his mouth to form words.

"I—I wasn't s-snooping," he said. "I'd just come to—to see you, like I said."

"Where'd you go after you left my place in such a hurry," demanded North.

"Why I—I came home here."

"You said you were going back to your office. You said there was a man waiting for you there."

"Yes, I know, but the man didn't wait."

"Who was the man?"

"Who was—— Why—I—it was a client. That is, it was a fellow wanted me to get his brother out of the can."

"That's a lie."

"You can't talk to me like that," whined Rustaff, in an unsuccessful attempt to be pugnacious.

"You've seen Monzello since I saw you last night."

"No. I swear I haven't."

"You've talked to him by telephone, then."

Rustaff's lips worked, but no words came.

"You know where he is," said North.

"No," said Rustaff. Perspiration streamed down his face.

"All right," said North, getting up. "I told you there was a new warrant out for you. If you don't tell me where Monzello is, I'll see that the warrant is served on you in ten minutes."

Rustaff made a move toward the drawer of the table. North promptly upset the table, crashing bottle and glasses to the floor in a shower of ashes and cigar butts. He hurdled the wreckage and pinioned Rustaff's arms. He felt of Rustaff's pockets and armpits. The bail broker was not armed.

"You're coming with me," said North. "We'll call on Monzello together."

A torrent of words burst from Rustaff's white lips.

"I can't—you can't make me do that, Mr. North. You can't. That's moider. Moider, Mr. North!"

"There's been lots of murder around here in the last few days," said North.

"I can't take you to Monzello, Mr. North. I can't. I——"

"You're scared, I know," said North scornfully. "All right, I'll give you a break, Rustaff. We'll take a taxi. You can stay outside. If the address ain't right, I'll be back pronto to let you know in my own quaint way. If it is, and I don't come right down in two minutes, the taxi driver'll have orders to bring you home again. That ought to be protection enough for you—if you got half the guts of that little dog of yours."

Rustaff shook his head. He mopped his ashens face.

"I——" he began.

"Get your hat, Rustaff," North ordered.

Rustaff walked unsteadily from the room, North keeping a firm grip on his arm.

CHAPTER XXII.

WALRUS SEES THINGS.

MAYOR MIKE tossed another piece of wood in the rusty stove which was doing its best to keep the nocturnal chill out of his flimsy shack.

"So you saw Handsome Hartford?" asked the carpenter.

"Finally," said Mayor Mike. "I been hangin' around the hospital ever since I read about him in the paper this mornin', but they didn't let me in until to-night. I said I was his uncle."

"Did he tell you anything?" asked the carpenter.

"He didn't want to," Mayor Mike replied. "Him and that Mrs. Daggett's afraid if they talk somethin'll happen to the baby. I finally told Handsome that I had to know whether him or Spig was the one to kick out of Shantytown. Then he gave me the whole story."

"What'd he say?"

"Plenty," said Mayor Mike. "I promised Handsome I'd keep my mouth shut. All I can say is that Spig is the one that gets booted out."

"Where is Spig, anyhow?"

"He ain't come back since last night," said Mayor Mike.

A breath of cold air on his back caused Mayor Mike to turn around. He saw Walrus stooping to enter the shack. Melted snow glistened on Walrus's mustaches, and his eyes were wide with excitement.

"Hey, Mayor," he exclaimed. "You read to-day where the *Tabloid* is offering a thousand dollars reward for the arrest of Frank Monzello?"

"Walrus," said Mayor Mike scornfully, "you know I never read them worthless newspapers."

"But a thousand dollars, Mayor," said Walrus. "And I know where Monzello is!"

"You know where he is?"

Walrus nodded violently.

"When I went down to Fulton market for our free fish this afternoon, a fellow I know said one of his regular men was sick and did I want to work for a few hours packing oysters. I did, all right. Just as I was finishing work, who did I see go by but this Monzello guy. I saw him go down the dock to talk to the skipper of the *Spray*. I waited, and when he came back, I followed him. He walked about ten or fifteen blocks, taking side streets. I saw him go into a house——"

"Remember where it was, Walrus?" demanded Mayor Mike.

"Couldn't miss it," said Walrus. "There's a big auto in front of the place."

"Why didn't you call the cops and get the thousand bucks?" asked the carpenter.

"I wanted to see Mayor Mike first," said Walrus, "and find out if it would be getting any of the boys in bad to have Monzello pinched."

Mayor Mike arose, lighted his corncob pipe, and turned up his coat collar.

"Come on, Walrus," he said. "Let's go get Monzello."

Walrus and Mayor Mike walked through the streets of the lower East Side. Except for a few desultory flakes, the snow had stopped. The slush on the sidewalks had frozen, and a thin coat of ice crunched under their feet.

They turned into a dark street. Walrus stopped and pointed.

"There it is," he whispered. "There's the auto."

Mayor Mike drew Walrus into a doorway. They were about thirty yards from the car and across the street.

"Who's that bendin' down by the wheels?" asked Mayor Mike. "It looks like Spig."

"By jinks, it *is* Spig!" exclaimed Walrus, under his breath. "Damned if it ain't Spig."

"What's he doin' to them wheels?" muttered Mayor Mike. "What's he got in that little can?"

"Looks like he's doing something on the brakes. Sure, he's smearing grease on the drums. Hell, he's greasing the brakes!"

"Funny!" breathed Mayor Mike. "What in hell——"

He stopped short. A scream split the night, followed by the crack of a shot, muffled by walls. Running feet clattered on the stairway of the house across the street.

Mayor Mike saw Spig go quickly to the rear of the auto, crouch close to the gas tank and trunk rack to avoid being seen.

Two shadowy figures burst from the doorway across the street, then a third. Mayor Mike and Walrus watched, motionless, as though frozen to the spot.

AT this very moment Lieutenant Hoag was talking to William Wight, who had walked into police headquarters a moment before.

"I was afraid I wouldn't find you," said Wight. "Sorry I couldn't get here earlier, but I just got your message. You wanted to see me about something in particular?"

"Yes," said Hoag. "I wanted to find out what you knew of Louis Rustaff."

"Rustaff?" Wight shook his head. "I don't recall ever having heard the name."

"He's a bail-bond broker. The reason I thought you might know him, is that a hat, which we found belongs to him, had the telephone number Avenue 9-3902 written in the band with indelible pencil."

"That's the number of the Vandoria," said Wight, "but it's also the number of some fifty other apartments besides mine. As a matter of fact, had you thought of connecting that number with this chap Collins? He was on duty at the switchboard for several weeks, you know."

"I'd thought of him," said Hoag, "and I——"

He paused in the middle of his sentence. A buzzer on his desk was sounding insistently. Hoag reached over and pushed a switch, cutting in a loud-speaker connected with the short-wave radio station broadcasting police alarms.

"Frank Monzello's big limousine

spotted, speeding down Fulton Street," droned the loud-speaker, "exchanging running gun fire with Patrolman Dunn in commandeered taxi, pursuing. All radio patrol cars in vicinity will proceed at once——"

Hoag snapped off the switch and stood up.

"On our way!" he announced.

"I'll drop in again to-morrow, if you'd like, lieutenant," said Wight. "Better come with me now," said Hoag.

"Now?"

"Come on," said Hoag.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NIGHTMARE.

PHIL COLLINS and June Lawn spent most of the day in the little room in which Frank Monzello had locked them the night before. Monzello had slept until noon, and had then recommenced his efforts to get Collins and the girl to write statements purporting to be eye-witness accounts of how William Wight had killed Arthur Bendick. When they persisted in their refusal, they were locked up again until dark.

During the evening the bored blonde brought them something to eat, and Monzello resumed his bullying—without results. Again they were locked up.

Toward midnight, Collins heard the key turn softly in the lock. The door opened slowly. The bored blonde was standing there. She nodded at Collins.

"You drive a car?" she whispered.

"Yes," said Collins.

The blonde handed him a key.

"Frank's taking a nap," she said. "The car's out in front. Take it and beat it away from here as fast as you can. And don't forget to take your girl friend with you."

"Thanks——" Collins began, taking the key.

"Don't thank me," drawled the blonde, looking at June Lawn. "I ain't being good to you. I'm just tired of seeing you around here."

Collins hesitated a second.

"Isn't it dangerous?" he whispered.

"Scared?" drawled the blonde.

"For you—if he should wake up," Collins explained.

"I can handle him," said the blonde. "Beat it!"

Collins and the girl tiptoed across the room, carefully avoiding the red plush furniture. They had almost reached the door when a sharp voice rang out behind them:

"Where you going?"

Collins turned his head. He saw Monzello standing at the back of the room, his black hair tousled with sleep.

Collins pushed June toward the door.

The brief thunder of a pistol shot pounded his eardrums. The shattered fragments of the mirror in the gilt frame crashed glittering to the floor.

June screamed, stumbled.

Collins caught her in his arms, dashed to the stairway.

"I'm all right. Let me down," she said in his ear.

They ran down the steps. As they neared the bottom, Collins heard Monzello clattering after them, shouting something.

Collins leaped across the sidewalk, pulled open the door of the car standing at the curb, pushed the key into the ignition lock. The girl jumped in beside him. He stepped on the starter. The engine roared into action.

Monzello came out of the doorway and jumped on the running board, pistol in hand. The car

leaped ahead. Monzello opened the rear door, stepped inside, pressed the muzzle of his gun to the base of Collins's brain.

"Drive where I tell you," he ordered.

As the car picked up speed, a long, strangled cry came from behind the automobile. Monzello turned his head nervously.

"Faster," he ordered Collins.

The cry seemed to be following the car. It mounted to a howl of terror. Monzello craned his neck, but could not see the man who was being dragged along behind.

Spig, crouching against the rear of the car as Collins came running out of the house, found his belt caught in the rear bumper when the car suddenly leaped into motion. He began to howl when his effort to free himself proved hopeless.

"Turn right!" ordered Monzello.

Collins hesitated, wondering if he should risk going straight ahead. Monzello jabbed the cold steel ring of the gun muzzle painfully into the back of his neck. Collins turned right.

THE screaming at the rear of the car became frantic yelling. Spig had managed to swing one leg up on the bumper, but he could not disentangle his belt. He was holding on with both hands, afraid of being mangled if he should be dragged along the pavement at the breathless speed the car was making.

His yells were attracting attention to the speeding car. Heads appeared at windows. A policeman came running to the corner, shouting. Two blocks away another policeman commandeered a taxi, and started in pursuit.

"Turn left!" ordered Monzello.

The car careened on two wheels,

tires moaning, as it swung into Fulton Street.

"Now open it wide!" commanded Monzello, again jabbing his gun into Collins's neck.

The motor roared as the speedometer needle climbed from sixty-five to seventy, seventy-five.

The taxi commandeered by the policeman was a block behind, its electric horn shrieking.

Three shots cracked.

A spider web suddenly appeared on the windshield in front of Collins, as a bullet pierced the shatterproof glass.

Monzello put his arm out the window and fired twice.

June Lawn slumped low in her seat beside Collins, paralyzed with terror.

Spig was still yelling from the rear bumper.

"Faster!" ordered Monzello again.

The speedometer needle showed eighty-five miles an hour.

Galvanized iron dock buildings loomed ahead. Slightly to the right was a high, grilled gate.

A shot clanked through a fender.

Monzello fired one more in reply.

"Through that gate," he ordered, turning back to Collins. "Stop at the end of the dock and jump in the schooner to the right. We're taking a sea trip."

The car flashed through the gate. Collins took his foot from the accelerator, and applied the brakes cautiously, so as not to skid on the wet pavement of the dock. There was no response. Then he jammed his foot on the brake pedal as far as it would go. The car hurtled down the dock unchecked.

"Slow up!" ordered Monzello.

A cold, nauseous feeling of helplessness surged up in Collins. His scalp crawled. He yanked back the emergency brake to the last notch.

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There was no change. The brakes were useless.

"Brakes!" Spig screamed from the rear bumper. "Brakes!"

The gleaming wet surface of the dock flashed backward under the madly racing car. Collins could see the end of the pier rushing toward him in the glare of the headlights. He saw masts bobbing against the blackness of the water, with nightmarish unreality.

"Stop! Stop!" shouted Monzello.

Collins did not take the time to tell Monzello that he couldn't stop, that the brakes wouldn't hold. The car was plunging toward the brink.

Collins took his hands from the wheel, his feet from the pedals. The car swerved, crashed through a stack of fish baskets, scattered them.

Collins drew up his legs, drove his feet through the windshield.

The runaway car catapulted off the end of the dock. For a breathless second it seemed to hang in mid-air. The front wheels dropped. A great geyser of water sprang from the surface of the East River as the car disappeared. The water poured back with a prolonged splash.

The river boiled and bubbled for an instant in a diffused, greenish, submarine glow from the headlights of the sunken car.

The glow dimmed, then vanished.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I KILLED HIM!"

THE Fulton Street fish markets swarmed with life at the first glimmer of daylight. The steel spider web of Brooklyn Bridge loomed black against the gray of dawn on the river. The towering skyscrapers of lower Manhattan, the usual background of the market, were lost in mists.

Fishing schooners nosed out of

the murk, their rigging covered with ice, their tiny square flags, signals of the catch, frozen stiff. Among the delivery wagons and ice trucks awaiting the schooners this morning were unfamiliar colors: green police cars, a white ambulance, a red fire truck. At the end of the dock the portable crane of the police emergency squad, swung out over the water, was grappling for a sunken automobile. Some blue-coated policemen moved among market men in hip boots and leather aprons, among sailors whose icy oilskins crackled as they walked.

Several office rooms above the markets had been converted into a combination emergency hospital and branch police station. Lieutenant Hoag sat near a stove. Near him sat William Wight, yawning. Opposite were Jim North and Louis Rustaff, who had come in at the tail end of the chase of Monzello's runaway auto. Mayor Mike and Walrus sat deferentially in the background. They had arrived breathless, after pursuing the car on foot.

In the next room doctors were working. Using the pulmotor for an hour, they had pumped life back into Frank Monzello. He had suffered the longest submersion. He would still be at the bottom of the river had it not been for Phil Collins.

As the automobile struck the water, Collins had dragged June Lawn through the broken windshield, pulled her to the surface, swum with her to the side of a schooner tied to the dock. Then he dove, found Monzello with a foot caught in the steering wheel, and managed to pull him free.

Spig had been thrown clear by impact with the water. He had tried hiding under the pier until the icy water drove him out. He was half dead from exposure when he surren-

dered to the small army of policemen gathered on the dock.

Hoag was looking out the window at the baskets of iced mackerel being carried across the street, when a doctor appeared in the doorway.

"I think they're all in condition to talk now, lieutenant," said the doctor. "Shall I bring them in?"

Hoag nodded.

Collins, June Lawn, Frank Monzello, and Spig came into the room, blue-lipped, wrapped in blankets.

Hoag pointed to Mayor Mike.

"Which is the man you say you saw greasing the brakes on Monzello's car?" he asked.

"The one on the right," said Mayor Mike. "His name's Spig."

"How about it, Spig?" asked Hoag. Spig said nothing.

"He got took by surprise when they came out," continued Mayor Mike, "and when the car started, he got tangled up in the back part—the trunk rack."

"Why did you want Monzello to kill himself—which you must have expected, greasing his brakes?" asked Hoag.

Spig looked at Monzello. His gaze moved on to Rustaff, to Wight, then to Mayor Mike. He said nothing.

"He was acting on orders," said Monzello suddenly. "He got orders from somebody else."

"Who?" asked Hoag.

There was a silence.

"You know this man, Collins?"

"Yes," said Collins, "but I don't know who gave him his orders."

"Do you know, Mr. Wight?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"How about you, Rustaff?"

"Me? How should I know? I don't know anything about this."

"Spig, you killed Harry Daggett," announced Hoag.

"I never did," said Spig, speaking for the first time.

LIEUTENANT HOAG got up. "Gents," he said, "I just learned from the Mayor of Shantytown that on the night Harry Daggett was murdered, somebody told Mrs. Daggett in the dark where she would find her husband's body. Mrs. Daggett has been in the next room, listening to your voices. She thinks she might recognize the voice she heard that night. Matron, bring in Mrs. Daggett."

Isabel Daggett entered in custody of a buxom police woman.

"Did you recognize the voice, Mrs. Daggett?"

"I did," said Isabel Daggett. "That's the man."

Without hesitation she pointed to William Wight.

"That's preposterous," said Wight, crossing his legs.

"No, it ain't!" said Monzello suddenly. "You're sunk, Wight. We're all sunk. Why don't you spill the truth?"

"Why would I want to kill Daggett—a man I didn't know?" insisted Wight.

"I'll tell you why," declared Monzello. "I'm going to tell the truth. By rights I'm a dead man, Wight. I'd be a corpse at the bottom of the river right now if it hadn't been for this kid Collins. And since I'm alive on a fluke, I'm going to try to square myself by telling the truth for once."

"The man's delirious, lieutenant, and——"

"First I'll tell you why he hired Spig to grease my brakes," Monzello continued. "He wanted to get rid of me because I wanted to muscle in on his racket. I threatened him with——"

"What racket?" interrupted Hoag.

"He's a smuggler," said Monzello. "He's been smuggling in hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of European lace every year, getting

out of paying hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of duty. It was a good game, and when it looked like I was going to have to retire from the fish market racket for a while, I decided to get in on Wight's business."

"What's that got to do with Harry Daggett?"

"I'll tell you. Wight used to smuggle in his lace by having men in the crew of two or three trans-Atlantic liners. The lace was packed in water-tight cases that would float when they got tossed overboard about twenty miles offshore. The fishing schooner *Spray* picked up the floating boxes and transferred 'em to the launch *Laughing Girl*. That's why there was two *Laughing Girls*—so there'd be an alibi in case one of 'em got spotted at sea. People would swear they saw the *Laughing Girl* in the Sound that same day. Well, Arthur Bendick would land the lace over on Long Island and truck it over to that loft building in Greene Street——"

"So Arthur Bendick was in Wight's employ?"

"That's not true!"

"Sure it's true," Monzello insisted. "That time Bendick got arrested for assault, he beat up one of my men who tried to get on the inside of this lace racket. Wight couldn't let Bendick go to jail, because there was a couple of lace shipments due in the next few weeks, and Bendick had to be on hand to pick 'em up. So he hired Harry Daggett to go to jail in Bendick's place. And when Daggett got rambunctious and he threatened to squeal six weeks later, Wight killed him."

"I got evidence, Monzello," said Hoag, "that you were the one that baited Daggett out the night he was killed."

"That's right," said Monzello. "I

bailed him out. I was going to take him out to sea, where he couldn't do no harm—maybe take him to Canada. But Wight got to him first and——”

“How did Wight know Daggett was out of jail?” asked Hoag.

THERE was a long pause. Finally Rustaff piped up.

“I’m going to come clean, too,” he said. “Wight knew, all right, because when Daggett got out of jail, he came to me and wanted to shake Wight down for a lot of dough. I telephoned Wight. Wight said ‘nothing doing,’ but I told him that Daggett was on his way to see Monzello at the Fulton Street dock. I followed. I saw Daggett and Wight arguing together. I tried to argue with Daggett, and he hit me. He knocked my hat off. I ran——”

“How about it, Wight?”

William Wight suddenly collapsed in his chair, as though he were a balloon that had been punctured. He made a feeble gesture.

“All right, since you’re all squealers—I’ll confess. I killed him.”

There was a moment of deep silence.

“I’d been worried for weeks,” he continued. His booming voice had sunk to little more than a whisper. His face was haggard. “I made a mistake in hiring this man Daggett. I found out he was stupid. A stupid man is dangerous. I became almost panicky when I discovered that Hartford had taken such an interest in Mrs. Daggett and was digging for details. I knew Hartford had found my lace stores, and that he was stealing from them to sell on Fourteenth Street; but I could do nothing without exposing myself. Then I hired Spig to watch Hartford, and found he lived in Shantytown. The night Daggett was bailed out, Spig told

me that Mrs. Daggett had come to Shantytown. Then, when Rustaff phoned that Daggett was after money, I knew the end had come. When a stupid man goes in for blackmail, he becomes a perpetual danger.”

“So you rushed down to head him off at the Fulton docks?”

“Yes. I was afraid he and Monzello would gang up against me. I didn’t intend to kill him at first. It was only after Rustaff had come and gone—leaving his hat behind—that I decided to commit murder. I took Daggett aboard the *Laughing Girl*, which was tied up near the dock with engine trouble. I took Rustaff’s hat along for a false clew. I knew that Bendick kept a shotgun in the cabin. I saw that the tide was coming in. I told Daggett a story about the money being aboard the boat. He followed me. I killed him.

“Then I drifted up as far as Shantytown and anchored. I intended the body to be a warning to Hartford and Mrs. Daggett. I thought that Rustaff’s hat and dog would turn suspicion from me—particularly since the launch was registered in Bendick’s name. Then I lost my head. I suspected everybody. I thought, when Collins came back to the Vandoria, he knew something. I was afraid that Hartford or Mrs. Daggett might talk, after all. I had Spig carry off the baby, knowing then that Mrs. Daggett and probably Hartford wouldn’t talk as long as they thought the baby was a hostage. But there was still Collins and Miss Lawn. I decided to wipe out everything—the lace, the loft building, prospective witnesses against me. Spig was to get the people into the building. Bendick was to block their escape, burn the building——”

“Why’d you kill Bendick?” asked Hoag.

"Because Rustaff heard Bendick getting ready to squeal," volunteered Jim North.

"That's right, Rustaff phoned me," said Wight.

"Rustaff is a damned accommodating guy," said Monzello. "He wants to please all his customers—specially them he's afraid of. Rustaff told me, after a lot of coaxing with gold and steel, that there was things happening in Greene Street Thursday night. That's why I was there. I saw Wight go in and come out. I didn't see him kill Bendick, but I guessed it. That's why I carried off these two youngsters. I wanted to use 'em as a club over Wight."

"And that's why Wight sent Spig to grease your brakes?"

"Ask Spig," said Monzello.

"That's right," grunted Spig. "Wight's been paying me."

"Where's my baby?" asked Isabel Daggett.

"The kid's all right," said Spig sullenly. "I parked him in a nursery. You can get him back to-day."

"Well, I guess that washes up everything," said Lieutenant Hoag, with a touch of pride. "I'll get a release for Mrs. Daggett after breakfast. And Wight, Rustaff, Spig, and Monzello can have breakfast at the Tombs. How about that thousand dollars' reward the *Tabloid* was of-

fering for the capture of Monzello, North?"

"I guess this chap Collins gets it," said North. "He was the one that fished Monzello out of the river by the collar."

"A thousand dollars?" June Lawn beamed on Collins. "What will you do with all that money, Phil?"

"Maybe Mayor Mike can use some of it to buy stoves and extra blankets for Shantytown," said Collins. "And maybe a few beefsteaks, to change off from fish chowder."

Lieutenant Hoag went over to Jim North and slapped the reporter resoundingly on the back.

"Well, North," he exclaimed. "I told you we'd have this mystery all cleared up so you could leave for your vacation on time. Getting away to-night?"

"Soon as my story's in type," said North. "I'm pulling out for Florida. I need a change. I'm fed up on this confounded routine. I crave excitement."

North was standing at the window. In the street below tons of fish were being packed in barrels of ice. Tubs of eels were being loaded into a truck.

"And what are you going to do in Florida for change and excitement?" asked Lieutenant Hoag.

"I'm going to fish," said North.



A GARDEN DUEL

A DAVENPORT, Iowa, garden was the scene of one of the strangest battles nature has ever staged. A snail and a twenty-inch garter snake engaged in a duel which, strange as it may seem, resulted in the death of the snake! Quite early in the contest, the snail got a hold on the snake which it never relinquished, and as the battle waged on the snail worked the head of its victim into its shell. The snake's writhings became weaker and weaker, then stopped altogether, leaving the snail a champion in the garden pool.



AN UNOFFICIAL DEPORTATION

By
Jack
Hulick

"A swell feed, swell liquor, and a swell fight."

FROM the veranda of the shabby little Hotel du Commerce, Jerry Harper watched a tramp steamer entering the harbor of Port des Galets. It crept up to the pier behind the fortnightly mail boat. The hoarse blast of its whistle was heard. Jerry's thin face was wreathed in smiles.

"She's in!" he exclaimed. "A real Yank ship. And when she jerks her hook, there's going to be a couple more real Yanks aboard—you and me!"

Bill Costigan gave no sign that he was aware of the ship or of his friend's words. He was reclining in a chair, hat tilted over one eye, sharp jaw resting on chest. Costigan was tall, broad-shouldered, and muscular; while Harper was small and wiry. They were likewise opposites in temperament: Costigan was hot-headed and impulsive, with a chip forever on his shoulder; Harper was very cool and calculating.

"Wake up!" urged Harper impatiently. "She's in, I tell you. And as pretty a job of berthing as I ever

saw! Slick, it was, the way she came into this trick harbor."

Without moving his head, Costigan opened his unobstructed eye and cocked it coldly upon Jerry Harper.

"How the hell did you expect it to come in—roll over on its side or jump in backward?"

"A neat job!" Harper insisted; then thrust out his jaw and declared: "We're leaving Reunion Island on that ship."

"We are not," Costigan disagreed, promptly and decisively. "I've told you a dozen times I don't budge off this island until the authorities declare me an undesirable alien and deport me—passage paid! You're worse than crazy if you think I'm going to work my way out. I've done all the work I'm going to do in this part of the Indian Ocean. If I ever lift a finger around here again, it'll be to knock Briffault for a double loop. Now shut up and let me sleep."

Whereupon Costigan's one visible eye closed again. His attitude, while startling, was not entirely unjustified, at least from his point of view. When the two Americans had wandered into Port des Galets, Costigan had secured a job as overseer of a coffee plantation. With typical Yankee energy, he had driven himself, driven the natives, and had ended by trying to drive the indolent owner. It was simply not the way of things in the island, as the owner, Briffault, had explained.

"You work too hard," he said wearily. "Even the sight of you tires me. Go where such talent is appreciated, my young friend, and leave me in peace. Just between you and me, I suggest you go to a madhouse."

Costigan's reply was unprintable. Now, Briffault was a rich man, hence a man powerful in island poli-

tics, and he was not accustomed to being called hard names. He promptly had Costigan arrested for slander, and the magistrate obligingly saw to it that Costigan, who was unable to pay a fine, was given sufficient time to repent his impudence.

THIRTY days is a long time in Port des Galets. While Costigan brooded them away in jail, Harper grew unutterably bored walking the streets. He was anxious to leave the island when Costigan was freed. Costigan, however, had other ideas. As a sort of protest gesture against the gross injustice that had been done him, he was determined to stay until deported. Just how he was to make himself obnoxious enough to achieve that end without running the risk of another jail sentence he did not know. But work his way out? Never!

Such very formidable stubbornness would have dismayed most men. But Jerry Harper had a good deal of the same stuff in him. His mind was as firmly made up as Costigan's, and he meant to have his way. So while Costigan dozed in his chair, Harper made his way to the pier, where a small mountain of coffee sacks was gradually vanishing into the newcomer's holds.

At close quarters, the ship belied her name of *Manhattan Maid*. She was, in fact, a distinctly frowzy old lady. From the tip of her blunt nose to her twisted taffrail, she was grimy with soot and raw with rust. Harper's enthusiasm was somewhat dampened as he visioned himself scrubbing her scarred decks, or chipping and painting her battered plates under a broiling tropic sun.

He had little time to reflect, however. A broad-shouldered indi-

vidual wearing an officer's cap came down the gangplank just then. He had a pug nose, curly black hair, and forearms that an ape would have envied. Harper stepped up to him and touched his hat with two fingers.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, with just the right amount of humility. "Are you the captain of this ship?"

The other took his pipe from his mouth and eyed Jerry Harper from head to foot and back again.

"I'm the mate," he said gruffly. "What th' hell do you want?"

"A job——"

"No." The mate shook his head decisively. "No jobs. See the consul."

"Wait! Listen!" begged Harper, and leaping in front of the mate, he launched into his story.

As with many men whom nature has not favored with muscle and brawn, Jerry Harper was endowed with nimble wits and a glib tongue. Thus his story was a good one, and he knew how to tell it. He stuck to facts up to the point where Costigan had been railroaded to jail. From then on his imagination came into free play.

The jail! Moriorty—the mate at this point admitted that was his name—couldn't imagine what the jail was like. If the cells hadn't been ten feet underground, they'd have crawled away. For company, Costigan had had half a dozen natives, murderers all, who'd nearly killed him once, big as he was. The food was so bad a starving ship's cat wouldn't have touched it. But that wasn't the worst of it! Upon his release, Costigan had been ordered to leave the island within three days or he would be returned to jail for a full year.

"The three days are up to-night," said Harper, a note of desperation

coming into his voice. "If we're here in the morning, they'll put us both in jail. We can't buy passage on the mail boat, and there isn't another ship in the harbor. You've got to take us out."

MORIORTY was scowling darkly. He was an American by birth, but an Irishman at heart. Resistance to oppression and injustice was his heritage. Even so, there were certain practical aspects of the situation that had to be considered. And the mate sucked at his pipe so long without making any comment that Jerry Harper became uneasy.

"You can't let us down," he pleaded. "We're fellow countrymen. Costigan's an Irishman, too."

This last pull at his Irish heart-strings was too much for the mate. He made up his mind abruptly.

"I'll do it; I'll take you out," he said. "I wouldn't sleep nights if I thought I'd let them blasted frogs lay you by the heels again. Blood's thicker than water, so it is."

The mate looked around; then, pitching his voice to a confidential whisper, went on:

"I tell you what: We're got a full crew, and I know the old man wouldn't sign you on regular. Owners would raise hell. But there ain't nothin' to keep you from stowin' aboard and turnin' up when we're at sea. The skipper'll raise hell on general principles when he finds you, but that won't matter. I'll ease things along for you."

"What's the skipper like?" Harper inquired uneasily, for he knew from experience that a stowaway's life could be made very unpleasant.

"He ain't a bad sort. A little bit stiff in the neck at times, but if you handle him right, he sails on an even keel. Just jump when he gives the

word and you get along with him all right."

"Maybe I'd better talk to him," suggested Harper doubtfully. "Where is he?"

"Ashore, and he won't be back until about five minutes before sailing time, which is midnight. He's a live one, the skipper is!" The mate closed one eye in a ponderous wink. "Now here's the lay," he went on seriously. "You and your pal come aboard along about eleven thirty. I won't be around to see you come, for I don't want no lies on my conscience in the morning. But I'll tip the watchman, and he'll show you where to stow. Then lay low, and don't show your mugs till morning, see?"

Harper's display of gratitude was so profuse that Moriarty's ears turned red, and he cursed roughly to hide his confusion. The mate went about his business with a warm feeling that he had served the twofold cause of charity and justice to the best of his ability.

Harper went off with his hands in his pocket, whistling briskly and cheerfully.

THE St. Charles is not, according to metropolitan standards, a fine hotel. It is, however, the best in Port des Galets, and the one most in repute among the town's elect. Twice a week they come there to dine, dance, play cards, and exchange gossip. It is their clubhouse; and, like clubhouses everywhere, it is exclusive. Prices are high, and strangers are not cordially received unless they appear to be somebody.

Careless of these facts, Jerry Harper and Bill Costigan boldly entered the hotel grounds when the dinner hour was in full swing. They were determined to dine in the best style

available, and hang the expense. The reason for such a splurge was the dissolution of their partnership. For Harper had firmly declared his intention to ship on the *Manhattan Maid*, whether or not Costigan did likewise.

They were still arguing the matter as they trudged up the drive.

"I don't get your point at all," complained Harper. "You said you wouldn't work your way out. All right! You don't have to. I've fixed it with the skipper to sign you on as supercargo, and me as relief wireless operator. We won't have a lick of work to do, and we'll eat in the officer's mess to boot. What more do you want?"

"I want you to shut up about it," retorted Costigan irritably. "I've told you how I stand, and that's final. If you want to go, then go. No hard feelings about it. You just see it one way, and I see it another."

"You're plain bullheaded!" protested Harper.

Costigan stopped and regarded his companion severely.

"Now listen, runt," he commanded. "I said there were no hard feelings, and I asked you up here for a good-by feed to prove it. I'm paying the bill, and I mean to enjoy myself. If you're going to squawk all evening, we'll call it off. Make up your mind."

"Have it your own way, Bill," shrugged Harper, and sighed long and deeply.

They approached the dining veranda, which was strung with Japanese lanterns, and vibrating to the rhythm of a native stringed orchestra. At the foot of the steps Harper paused before an hibiscus bush. Right under the eyes of the head waiter he plucked a large and showy blossom and fixed it in his buttonhole.

IT was a bad introduction. The head waiter looked over the pair critically, then signed swiftly to the manager. The latter came bustling up; a fussy, spade-bearded little Frenchman, very much impressed with himself and the persons whom it was his duty to entertain. He took one look at the newcomers' rumpled ducks, at their scuffed shoes, at their untrimmed hair.

"No, no, no!" he cried, waving them away imperiously. "You can't come in here. This is for ladies and gentlemen. Go away! Get out!"

Costigan marched on up the steps, cocked his head a little, and scowled down at the little manager.

"Say that again," he requested ominously. "I don't think I heard you right."

"Ah! Just as I thought!" cried the manager triumphantly. "You're drunk!"

"Not yet. But I mean to get drunk very soon. What about it?"

Costigan thrust out his sharp jaw; his gray eyes bored into the Frenchman's. The latter grew more respectful.

"What I mean," he said with an elaborate shrug, "is that these tables are all taken. This is mail-boat day; we have an unusually large crowd. You know, planters and others who live out of town are here to-night."

"We know all about the mail boat and the planters," declared Costigan. "We also know that this is a hotel, open to the public as long as they're free, white, and twenty-one, and got the price to pay." Costigan slapped his pocket confidently. "We've got the price, and we certainly mean to eat here."

Harper had been paying very little attention to all this. He was craning his neck anxiously around the room. Suddenly his face lighted up.

"There's a table!" he cried, pointing.

"Reserved," shrugged the manager, without even looking. "It is too bad. You must come again some time."

"We'll take that table," decided Costigan.

"No, no, no!"

"We'll—take—that—table!" The words came like bullets.

The manager was mute with rage. He wanted to strike Costigan and his undersized friend; he wanted to kick them bodily down the steps and trample on them. The instinct of self-preservation warned him, however, that if he gave in to his impulses, the outcome would likely be very disastrous to himself. Somehow he controlled himself, even to the point of making a dignified bow.

"This way, messieurs," he said, and looked straight ahead to avoid the frowns that some near-by guests directed at him.

Costigan looked very grim as he sat down. Harper, on the contrary, looked highly elated. He was even so reckless as to wink at a fluffy-haired girl who was regarding him disdainfully. She jumped as if stuck with a pin, and tossed her head haughtily. A few moments later, when her escort wasn't looking, she peeked hopefully at Harper for another wink. By then he was engaged with a more important matter.

"No wine," he was telling a waiter. "We want cognac; the very best. And bring the bottle, mind."

COSTIGAN'S glance roved challengingly over the faces of the diners. His Irish temper, already irritated by Harper's nagging arguments, had not been improved any by the manager's greeting. It was obvious that Costi-

gan had a chip on both shoulders, and was fairly begging some one to knock them off.

His gaze was suddenly arrested by sight of two men seated at a table opposite his own. One of these men was short and stocky, with a countenance so severe that it might have been hacked out of granite. The other was a swarthy, sloe-eyed man with fleshy jowls and puffy eye sacks that told of too much food and too little work. Costigan did not know the former, but he knew the latter very well indeed. This man was Monsieur Briffault, he who had railroaded Costigan to jail.

It was the first time the two had met since Costigan's release from jail, and the resentment that had been smoldering in Costigan for weeks was kindled into flame. His gray eyes fairly burned. Briffault returned the stare with stony contempt. Neither man made any attempt to acknowledge their acquaintance.

Briffault's gaze fell first, however, and he resumed his conversation with the granite-faced man. Costigan turned back to Harper, who had observed the clash of eyes, and was watching his companion narrowly.

"For two cents I'd knock that confounded frog for a loop," growled Costigan.

"What d'you suppose he's doing here?" inquired Harper.

"He always comes to town on mail-boat day. I might have known he'd be here. Who's the squarehead with him?"

"Never saw him before," replied Harper. "They're talking about coffee. Must be a planter."

The manager, in the hope of getting rid of his unwanted guests as soon as possible, had their dinner served with remarkable dispatch. Meanwhile he hovered around, like

an old hen whose brood of chicks is menaced by a hawk. He felt hot all over whenever any one of the regular patrons, after an insolent examination of the Yankees, would turn to him with an inquiring look of disapproval. He grew cold again whenever Bill Costigan's gray eyes happened to light on him.

"*Sacre!*" he prayed fervently. "Will they never finish?"

The Americans ate slowly. It was not often they treated themselves to such a dinner. And when at length they had finished, they showed no signs of leaving. On the contrary, they filled their glasses with brandy, lighted cigarettes, and settled themselves comfortably.

The manager stifled a groan and betook himself elsewhere. The sight was too hateful for him to endure longer.

The time passed pleasantly for Harper and Costigan. They sipped brandy, smoked, and watched the dancers. The bottle before them was slowly emptied. A waiter somewhat reluctantly brought another. Costigan continued to drink steadily. Harper drank more sparingly. From time to time a shadow of frown touched his thin face, and he looked speculatively from Costigan to Briffault, each of whom seemed to have forgotten the other's presence.

A LONG toward ten o'clock, when the second bottle was nearly empty, Bill Costigan produced a pipe. It was scarred and chewed on the stem; but it had the faculty of making even the cheapest tobacco taste sweet. Which had long since endeared it to Costigan, who, being a man of very limited means, was forced to smoke cheap tobacco. He was soon sending up clouds of poisonous smoke.

L Briffault was engaged in an earnest discussion with his granite-faced companion when the first cloud drifted between them. He checked his speech abruptly, sniffed, looked around. He scowled at Costigan, and ostentatiously fanned himself with a handkerchief. Costigan failed to see the gesture, however, and puffed on contentedly. He was feeling very mellow, and was oblivious to Briffault and the memories he evoked.

Soon, however, others began to look around for the source of the noxious fumes. Men frowned and muttered. A woman or two coughed tactfully. Thus encouraged, Briffault beckoned a waiter, who in turn approached Costigan.

"Please, sir," the fellow said doubtfully, "but the gentleman objects to your smoking."

"Huh!" Costigan, slumped in his chair, came erect with a start. "You don't say! What gentleman?"

The waiter indicated Briffault. Whereupon Bill Costigan's mouth turned down at the corners.

"Oh, him!" he said, and made a gesture as if he were brushing away a fly.

Costigan seemed about to slump back in his chair when all of a sudden he straightened and fixed the waiter with a concentrated stare.

"I like to smoke," he said. "I always smoke when I drink. I'm going to smoke now. If the gentleman doesn't like it, tell him to go to the devil!"

Costigan hitched himself around in his chair. For a long second he looked straight at Briffault. Then he turned back and puffed vigorously at his pipe. Harper noisily chuckled his approval. The waiter went for the manager.

At this point the fluffy-haired girl, who had been pouting all evening

because Harper had not looked at her again, was seized with a fit of coughing. She was determined to make him look at her once more, whereupon she would promptly snub him and be happy again.

Briffault, however, misunderstood her motives. He saw her only as a lady in distress of another sort. Being a gallant man—when surrounded by friends—he rose and went over to Costigan.

"Monsieur," he said haughtily, "you make a nuisance of yourself. Kindly put out that filthy pipe or remove yourself immediately from the veranda."

Costigan's mellowness, already ebbing swiftly, now vanished completely. Immediately the tide of his hatred of Briffault swept over him. His reply to the Frenchman's mandate was to emit a great cloud of smoke. Briffault suddenly found himself enveloped by heavy fumes that caught at his throat and made him gag.

"*Allez!*" he spluttered angrily. "I myself shall throw you out!"

THEN Briffault lashed out blindly, striking Costigan's mouth with the open palm of his hand. The orchestra chose that moment to stop, so that the sound was distinctly audible over the entire veranda. Then, before Costigan could move, Briffault caught up a glass of brandy and hurled the contents into his face.

"Pig! Camel! Take that!" he cried.

The veranda was immediately in an uproar. Chairs crashed over backward, glasses were swept to the floor. The fluffy-haired girl screamed shrilly. From all sides, men rushed toward the scene of the quarrel. Some of them surrounded Costigan, pushing him this way and

that, imploring him to hold his temper and act like a gentleman.

The granite-faced man was one of the last to move. He rose slowly and went up to Briffault.

"Leave this to me," he said calmly. "I know how to handle drunken beach combers."

Blinded by the brandy, some moments passed before Costigan was ready for action. But as soon as he had wiped the stuff from his eyes, he lifted his head like an angry bull. He uttered a soft bellow that scattered the circle of men surrounding him. Then he made straight for Briffault.

The granite-faced man, however, suddenly appeared to block his way. He jerked a horny thumb, and in a voice of unquestionable authority, said:

"Get out!"

Costigan didn't argue. He hardly even stopped. His fist shot out with the kick of a mule in it. It struck the other on the jaw and sent him reeling into the crowd. When helped to his feet some minutes later, he was minus a perfectly good bicuspid and an equally good canine tooth.

When Briffault saw that nothing separated himself from six feet of Yankee muscle and brawn, backed up by a volcanic Irish temper, he lost his head. He seized a carafe and hurled it at Costigan. It missed Costigan's head by half an inch, but doubled his fury.

Unluckily, the little manager chose that moment to dash into the fray. His shrill pleas for the combatants to cease for the honor of the establishment died on his lips. The carafe struck him a glancing blow on his head, and he went down for good.

Then Bill Costigan closed in on Briffault, and very quickly proved

to the swarthy Frenchman that thirty days in jail can have results that he had never dreamed of. Costigan did not assassinate Briffault, but he came close to it. Briffault never looked quite the same afterward.

Harper, meanwhile, was not idle. He saw to it that Costigan and Briffault were not interrupted. He danced round and round the swaying pair, shoving back the crowd. He struck when and where necessary to accomplish his end, and he kept up a ceaseless flow of insult.

It was Harper, more than Costigan, who aroused the patrons to concerted action at last. It was all right for them to insult strangers with glassy stares, but when strangers insulted them, that was a different matter. A brave fellow on the edge of the crowd finally called them to arms.

"Throw them out!" he yelled. "It is an outrage! It is a disgrace! Throw the bandits out!"

Harper urged them on with jeers and taunts. He did not seem at all afraid as the crowd slowly closed in. The reason was, he had an ace up his sleeve. He played just as the first pair of hands reached out to seize him.

He leaped into the air and pulled down a string of Japanese lanterns. With the circuit broken, the entire veranda was instantly plunged into darkness. Likewise, it was plunged into chaos.

When the police arrived ten minutes later, and lights were rigged up, the veranda looked like a hurricane had struck it. Tables were overturned, the floor was littered with broken china, and silverware was strewn everywhere. Several women had fainted, and not a few of the men had blackened eyes and bloodied noses. Never in the history of

Port des Galets had anything like this happened outside of the waterfront dives. There was talk of lynching the two Americans.

THE two Americans, however, were nowhere around. They were, in fact, several blocks away, bolting headlong for the waterfront.

"Which way, runt?" panted Costigan as they leaped over the railroad tracks.

"The *Manhattan Maid*," gasped Harper in reply.

"But our baggage?" protested Costigan. "We can't leave it."

"Got to! You're an undesirable alien now, and you're being deported, whether you like it or not!"

Costigan offered no further protest, but redoubled his efforts, for the *Manhattan Maid* had suddenly become a very desirable objective in his eyes.

The hour was late, and the streets deserted. The two fugitives reached the steamer without mishap, were received with open arms by the watchman, and stowed in a lifeboat. There they lay for an anxious hour, listening to the shouts and cries of police patrols and self-appointed posers of outraged citizenry that were scouring the town and harbor for them. It seemed an eternity before midnight came and the ship sailed them away to safety.

Moriarty made a great show of "surprise" when he discovered the Americans early next morning. He dressed them down severely for the benefit of the crew, then led them before the captain.

The stowaways turned pale as they came face to face with the captain. He himself turned a fiery red. The three, it appeared, had met before. As evidence of their acquaintance, the captain had a badly swol-

len jaw and was minus a perfectly good bicuspid and an equally good canine tooth.

The captain was Briffault's granite-faced companion!

A long minute of suspended animation ensued. Then the captain turned to the mate.

"What's all this, Mr. Moriarty?" he inquired. "Stowaways, eh! Well, well! What do you know about that, now!"

And the captain's granitelike face cracked in a smile that made the stowaways feel sick.

"How'd they get aboard?" wondered the captain presently. "Came up the hawsers like a couple of dock rats, I suppose. Well, my hearties, you'll find dock rats aren't very popular aboard this ship."

"I thought," stated Costigan bravely, "that we were to be signed on as supercargo and wireless operator."

The captain looked dumfounded. So did the mate. Then the captain smote the chart-room table with a fist like a mallet and roared:

"Ho! That's a good one! Drunk as a lord yet, aren't you?" The captain suddenly sobered and fixed Costigan with a brassy stare. "Well, mister, I'll give you something to sober you up. It's two thousand miles to Cape Town. You're going to live on bread and water till we get there, and you're going to work till you drop. And if you so much as bat an eye the wrong way, I'll break your heads. Now get out of my sight before I remember the teeth you knocked out of my head."

THE sun was lifting over the horizon, a fiery red ball that forecast a scorching day, when Moriarty led the two stowaways forward. They had eaten generously of bread, and had washed

it down with cold water. In their hands were chipping hammers.

"Get to work," ordered Moriarty harshly. "You pulled a fast one on me, you did. One peep out of either of you and I'll break your heads myself."

When the mate had gone, Costigan and Harper stood very still, looking down at the rust-eaten deck. Then Costigan looked at Harper.

"You fixed it, all right," he said, speaking from the corner of his mouth. "Supercargo—wireless operator—eat in the officers' mess. You runt! I ought to knock you for a loop!"

He took a step toward Harper, who backed away.

"Had everything framed, didn't

you?" pursued Costigan. "You got me up to the St. Charles, knowing that fat Briffault would be there, and we'd tangle somehow. 'Fess up! Didn't you, now?"

"How was I to know it was Briffault's coffee that was being shipped on this tub?" pleaded Harper by way of admission.

Costigan took another step toward Harper, who raised his hammer in warning. Then Costigan's bruised face broke into a grin.

"Put down that hammer, runt," he chuckled. "I wouldn't have missed it for the world. A swell feed, swell liquor, and a swell fight."

"And we're out of that confounded town," added Harper.

"Right! Shake on it!"



EAT HERBS AND KEEP CALM

RECENTLY, at Kaihsien in the Province of Szechwan, died one of the oldest—if not *the* oldest—men in the world. According to his own reckoning, Li Chung-yun was one hundred and ninety-seven years old. The belief among Chinese authorities is that Li Chung-yun misrepresented his age. According to them, he was two hundred and twenty-five years old. Chinese dispatches which were unearthed by a professor at Changtu University, show that in 1828, a hundred and five years ago, official felicitations were received by Li from the Chinese government. The occasion was his one hundred and fiftieth birthday. And again, in 1877, he was congratulated when he passed the two-hundred-year mark.

From Chungking comes the information that in 1930 Li Chung-yun said that he had buried twenty-three wives and was living happily with the twenty-fourth.

The aged Chinaman, still hale and hearty, said that he had always drunk great quantities of rice wine throughout the two and a half centuries of his life. Li Chung-yun also said that he had eaten nothing but herbs all his life, and that he never indulged in any form of violent exercise. He attributed his great number of years to harmony of spirit and soul, which produced great peace of mind and inward calm.

A Chinese general who had once ruled Peiping as a war lord, stated that Li Chung-yun had lived in his house over a period of time, and that he had found him "an educated and virile fellow." The general had also heard Li lecture on "how to get the most out of each century."



KILLER'S LUCK

By James Stevens

Bad-ax Carhart—trail tamer!

THE mackinawed back of "Smoky" Fournier made a broad target as it loomed darkly against the ice of the lumber river and the snow-laden pines of the far bank. Sam Flick—"Red Sam" to his sixty lumberjacks—was an open forty feet behind Fournier as he stepped from the shelter of a charred snag. His thick right arm swung out a double-bitted ax with a five-pound blade.

The gray-blue twilight of the winter woods was closing over the stumps, snags, and windfalls of the

banking grounds. Snow struck in lashing lines across the clearing between Smoky and Red Sam.

The ax lifted in a deliberate overhanded swing. As the blade approached the highest sweep of its arc, the speed of the stroke swiftened so smoothly that Red Sam seemed only to toss the ax with a lazy shift of shoulders and arm.

For an instant a whistling whine knifed through the boom of the storm. The whirling blade made a dull glitter through the slanting lines of snow. The hickory handle

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spun like a spoke in the hub of a racing wheel. Red Sam shifted back into the shelter of the charred snag.

The whine of the flying blade ended in a muffled thud. Then the rumble of rolling logs sounded from the river bank. The rumble muttered out. For a long minute Red Sam listened through the boom of the storm. At last his chest heaved in a great breath. Crouching out from behind the snag, the killer ran like a bear for the rollways.

This was the first day of the sleigh haul in the Sleet River pinery. Only a crust of logs lay on the long slope of the bank, with a small pile at the bottom bulwark. Smoky Fournier's body was huddled against that pile. Evidently his fall had unloosed some logs and he had rolled down with them.

Blood oozed from a great gash in the back of Fournier's mackinaw. The coat was new, its red-and-green checks vivid in the falling snow. Red Sam wadded the folds of the mackinaw against the ooze of blood, then swung the lifeless body up in his arms. He ran, clumsily but with amazing speed, out on the river ice and rounded the butt of a windfall that jutted from the bank above the rollway. Here was a big eddy, too riotous for freezing, under a sheer bank. There was a heavy splash, a swirl of black water momentarily streaked with red.

Five minutes later Red Sam was still searching for his ax on the rollway logs. Its disappearance was the one streak of black luck in the working out of a shrewd plan. At last he had to be satisfied with a conviction that the ax had lodged under the logs of the rollway. There it should remain undiscovered until spring, when the rollways would be broken out for the log drive down-

river. In the meantime nobody in this neck of the woods was apt to question Sam Flick. He was the boss of a winter-bound camp, the czar of Sleet River.

The snowfall was already blanketing the tracks and stains about the rollway. Red Sam headed back for the snag. In a minute he was vanishing in the slash, snowshoeing toward a strip of felled pines in which he had blazed skid trails during the afternoon.

The wind rushed over the river ice. The thunder of blowing boughs in the pines of the far bank surged through shadows and snow.

It was black weather when "Bad-ax" Carhart swung into the rollway with the last load of logs for the day. He lifted a halloo for the rollway boss. Getting no response, the teamster decided that Fournier had already started afoot on a short-cut trail for camp. He canthooked his load off the sleigh and swung his four horses around from the banking grounds.

IT was a night for mystery in the woods. The norther slashed through chinks in the bunk shanty and pounded the shake roof. An endless thunder surged from the pines above camp. The flames of the pyramid of logs blazing on the open camboose—a square of raised earth in the center of the shanty—leaped toward the smoke hole in the roof. This light flowed and ebbed over the rugged, mackinawed figures hunched on benches that circled the camboose.

Every man was staring wide-eyed at Ed Stair, the boss teamster. Stair was generally as close-mouthed as Red Sam, but he was talking freely now about the disappearance of Smoky Fournier.

"No man would take a run out in

the winter woods with a blizzard threatenin' unless he was skeered of his neck," declared the boss teamster. "It looks plain as daylight to me. Bessie Murdock and Herb Hall drive into camp to see Smoky special—fifty miles in a cutter from Menominac. That means *business*. Smoky learns they're here, and it's hell-bent for him. How he learned is the mystery."

Stair paused and regarded Bad-ax Carhart. The men on the benches shifted uneasily and a mutter ran around. But nobody else spoke up. It was simple wisdom for a jack to attend strictly to his own affairs in the Sleet River camp. It was wiser still to backtrack from the first smell of trouble with Bad-ax Carhart.

The teamster was in from supper, smoking a pipe in the shadows of his bunk before going to bed down his four horses. But now Carhart turned toward Stair. The silence in the shanty became so close that the thunder of the storm seemed to swell into sudden fury.

Stair held his seat, waiting impassively. He was a swarthy, lank man, hugely boned, with the black eyes of an Indian. And he was an Indian on the woods and river trails, and also in his habit of snaking a knife from his shirt when a fight threatened.

Bad-ax Carhart had earned an ugly reputation as a hellion in the saloon rows of Menominac. And he was a champion ax man in the woods and a top hand on the sleigh hauls and river drives. But now the Sleet River jacks were seeing the hellion in the red light and smoky shadows of the camboose fire. His head, crowned by a shaggy mane of sandy hair and fronted with a face that was slashed with scars from a hundred fist-and-boot battles, made one

think of hewn rock. His eyes had the look of blue steel. He chopped out his words like chips from a pine.

"We're talkin' turkey," Bad-ax said, hauling up before the boss teamster. "You're tryin' to play me foul, bully. Held me on the haul an hour longer than anybody. Now you intimate I'm hooked up with Fournier in a killin', that I warned him. Talk up. Hear me?"

"I said nothin' of a killin'," snarled Stair.

"Don't try to palaver me, Stair. Talk turkey. You meant that Martin Murdock was killed in the woods by Smoky Fournier last spring. You meant that he learned Murdock's girl was in camp and Smoky took a run out to save his neck. You meant that Smoky Fournier was warned by me—hey?"

Stair's answer was to ease a bony hand inside his mackinaw, his eyes narrowing to glittering black slits. As Carhart moved, the boss teamster kicked back his bench and came up like a striking snake.

But Carhart was moving backward—three swift steps, his huge right hand driving for the boarhide belt from which the slim double blade of a felling ax of Norway steel always jutted. At the third step the handle of the ax was solidly in his grip.

STAIR'S long body coiled into a crouch. The blade of a hunting knife flashed in the red firelight. Carhart lunged. Stair swerved from the threat of the ax, his knife hand faltering. In the instant Carhart jerked the ax blade down, shifting his grip. It was the hickory handle that swept over from a jerk of the wrist. The hard wood struck Stair's arm with paralyzing force. The knife thudded to the hard earth of the shanty floor.

"Now, then, bully," growled the hellion. "Now we'll talk turkey—with fist and boot."

"No, you won't." A dull, wooden voice hammered from the shanty door. "Chop 'er now. I do all the fightin' in this here camp."

Even as he fell back, Bad-ax Carhart was thinking that this horning in of Red Sam's was a little too timely to be accidental. It was his hunch that the camp boss had been lurking at the door from start to finish. But he said nothing. Red Sam's word was law on Sleet River. Bad-ax had to take it, or take the trail. And he had plenty of private reasons for wanting to hold on in this neck of the Sleet.

"You're a king jack," stated the camp boss. "But Ed is the boss of the sleigh haul. I need you both. Whoever starts trouble again gets a run-out, but first he settles with me. Now shake up."

Stair had apparently lost his venom. He shoved out a hand. Carhart took it for a shake. Things were working in his head. A queer play, he thought. But he let it go. He had a deal of his own to riffle in this Sleet River game.

"Ed, you track over to the van shanty with me," Red Sam was saying. "I told my company you know plenty about that band of Chippeas up the Sleet. You might give 'em a blaze on the trail of Smoky Fournier."

"He hid out with the Injuns once before, right enough," said Stair. "If Carhart would talk, though, we could probably—"

"Chop it." Red Sam muttered the command, but it was harshly compelling. "I'm askin' him nothin'. Questions ain't healthy in the woods, hey, Bad-ax?"

"Not to me," growled the hellion. "I got my horses to bed, sleep to

make, and logs to haul. That's all I know."

Red Sam's stony eyes glinted with satisfaction. Bad-ax Carhart, it seemed, was a man after his own heart. The teamster turned to his bunk. He yanked on a mackinaw and cap and shoved the Norway ax back into his boar-hide belt. Then he lighted a lantern and trailed Red Sam and Stair to the door.

Out in the stormy darkness Carhart separated from the two without a word and headed for the stable. But as soon as he heard the bang of the van-shanty door he doused the lantern and swung around. In a moment he was prowling at the shanty window.

BAD-AX CARHART was a deputy U. S. marshal of the Menominee district, but his commission was a secret to all but Marshal John Swayne and himself. Carhart's value as a trail tamer was in his reputation as a lawless timber savage. The infection of the Menominee frontier with timber pirates who joined thievery with murder had at last forced Carhart to take the side of law and human decency.

Six weeks ago Marshal Swayne had ordered his trail tamer to Sleet River. The case was the disappearance of Martin Murdock, trapper and owner of two sections of pines on the Sleet. Murdock had vanished in the woods last spring. A land-office notice of a sale of the Murdock timber for delinquent taxes gave the marshal a solid clew. Sam Flick was the under-cover buyer. The collection of solid evidence against the Sleet River boss was a job for Bad-ax Carhart.

So far the deputy had played a cautious game. His own savage instinct was simply to track down an

evildoer and take the law into his own hands. Even a Red Sam would talk turkey, if cornered with a pine torch threatening his eyes, or with a razor-edged ax drawing blood at his throat. But the ways of the law are not so primitive, as Marshal Swayne had at last made his hellion realize. And Carhart had to guard his secret, maintain his mask. He was learning the law. But in a crisis he generally reverted to the instincts of Bad-ax, the timber savage.

These instincts surged in him now as he peered through the window of the van shanty. Red Sam and Ed Stair were questioning Bessie Murdock and the lawyer lad, Herb Hall. The woods boss was squatted on the van chest, nodding agreement as Stair talked. The latter stood by the box stove, his black eyes glittering in the candlelight. Hall faced the boss teamster. He was a lean, loose-jointed young giant, but he appeared soft and awkward in woodsman's garb. But the lad had a gray fighting eye and a hard jaw.

From that simple impression an idea began to spark in the deputy marshal. It was smothered for a moment as he wondered at the girl beyond the window. She had a white flower of a face above a huddle of bear-skin coat—Hall's coat, Carhart surmised. But what the devil was she here for? Why hadn't Hall come alone? Probably he had no suspicion of Sam Flick. And he was a greenhorn.

The sight of Bessie Murdock hardened Carhart's primitive resolution. It was for the likes of her that he had turned trail tamer. His gaze roved toward the girl again.

Then it was caught, held intensely, by a double-bitted ax hung on the log wall. Red Sam blazed his roads and trails with an ax that was a twin of the one Carhart packed

in his boar-hide belt, a prime blade of Norway steel. Every night the camp boss hung the ax on a peg above the van chest when he came in from the woods. An ax was in the place now, one so like the other that even a knowing eye would be apt to pass it over. But Carhart was on the prowl for trail signs. The edge of the bits on the ax there had a deeper curve than the Norway. It was a common camp ax.

The rest of the scene instantly lost interest for the deputy. He fell back into the shadows of stormy darkness, remembering an idea that Marshal Swayne had once hammered into him.

"There's a thing I call killer's luck, Carhart," the marshal had said. "You keep it in mind when you're tempted to tear loose and chop a confession out of a man you're tracking down. It's the rule that a killer always makes some slip. Murder will out. Look for that slip. Killer's luck is the law's percentage in your game."

Carhart remembered now. And it was his hunch that the switch of Red Sam's prize ax for a camp tool was a hole card in this deal.

That idea about the young giant of a greenhorn, Herb Hall, was yet firing up in Carhart. It called for savage action. So, as he headed down for the stable shanty, Carhart projected a plan that was half law and half primitive vengeance—his usual compromise.

FOR once Carhart took scant care of his sleigh horses. He gave them just enough licks with currycomb and brush to make Stair know that he had been down, then he doused his lantern and left the stable. He swung swiftly through the blowing snow and shadows for the camp lights up the slope.

As Carhart neared the kitchen shanty a blacker shadow loomed suddenly ahead. Stair bunked in the stable feed room. He was apparently coming down to turn in.

"That you, Bad-ax?" Stair's harsh voice cut through the shadows.

"Who else?"

"What's the matter with your lantern?"

"They were face to face now.

"What do you think? The storm whiffed it out, of course." Carhart hauled up, playing the part of Bad-ax again. "Harken to a word, bully," he rasped. "We'll keep peace, if you just log and don't try to play fox with me. I don't give a damn about Smoky Fournier. But don't try to hook me in on his run-out. I want to know if you shot off your mouth to the Murdock girl and that greenhorn."

"I told 'em what Red Sam did," Stair replied sullenly. "And that you know nothin'. As for us, tend your team proper and hold up your end on the haul, and we'll get along."

"If we don't, you'll be gettin' along without a neck, bully," growled Carhart, shoving on. "And that's a tough trick."

As he turned into the gap between the kitchen and bunk shanties, Carhart stopped to consider his next move. The gap was a twelve-foot space covered by a shed roof and used for the storage of firewood. Lantern light glimmered through the cracks in the kitchen door. The cook was still working—and he was not alone. Shifting closer, Carhart caught the sound of voices through the planks of the door. He swung into the shelter of the wall and stood like a stump. Cold minutes passed. But at last the door opened. Red Sam bulked out in the dim oblong of light, with Herb Hall towering beside him.

"You rest easy now," Red Sam boomed in hearty tones. "Your gal will be snug and safe in the van. I don't mind bunkin' up with the men a particle. And don't you notice the growls of the cook. Glad to make you comfortable, mighty glad. It plagues me to the marrow that Fournier sneaked out on you. G'night, young feller."

Red Sam swung on into the bunk shanty. Hall stood fast, staring after him. Then the giant shape of the lad moved toward the open and halted again. He was watching the light of the van-shanty window. Suddenly it went out.

"She'll be all right." Hall spoke aloud, reassuring himself. "Maybe I'm wrong about Sam Flick. He seems such a simple, great-hearted man of the woods——"

Hall's voice trailed out in the wind. He swung back for the kitchen. As the door closed on him, Carhart tramped on for the bunk shanty. Inside, he shuffled wearily for his bunk, yawning hugely as he hung up his lantern. The jacks were turning in. A half dozen were still on the benches at the sinking fire of the camboose. Red Sam bulked among them. He was explaining the presence of Bessie Murdock and Herb Hall in camp.

"It was a breed from that Chipewa band up the Sleet that started 'em," boomed Red Sam. "Come to Menominac with a pack of pelts and got hisself swacked on whisky. His drunken blab hitched Smoky Fournier with the vanishin' of Martin Murdock. The breed pitched out next mornin', but the talk got around to the Murdock girl. The law would do nothin' on just a rumor, so she vowed to come after Fournier herself. Made the law shark join her. They stopped last night at LeBlanc's farm, and figgered to make it back

to-day. But the storm stalled 'em. That's how we got our company."

"Seems the rumor was right," ventured one of the jacks. "Fournier must have Murdock's blood on him, to take out in this weather."

"He'll make the Chippewa camp easy," said another. "The Injuns'll lose him from anybody. What I wonder is who warned him."

Red Sam sucked at his pipe. Silence fell around. Carhart knew that suspicious stares were fixed on his broad back. But he knew, also, that the suspicions would not be voiced, not after his show-down with Stair. He rolled into the shadows of his bunk. There he pulled off his boots and mackinaw and burrowed into his blankets. In a minute he was snoring heavily.

CARHART let some thirty minutes pass before he stirred in his bunk. It was the best time for a move. The fire was smoldering low and chill air was creeping into the shanty. In another half hour some jack would rouse up from the cold and replenish the fire. The storm was now heaving in a furious blast along the log walls. Carhart crept up and out like a prowling cat. At the door he paused, listening. There was no sound from Red Sam's bunk. The deputy eased out, latching the door noiselessly behind him. He stooped to pull on his calked boots and lace them. Then he ran on, pulling into his mackinaw.

He headed down for the stable shanty. The wind was still booming heavily, but the snowfall had slackened for the time being. Carhart was relieved at the prospect of a short storm. Even if his plan went through, a blizzard-locked camp would make a bad complication in the morning.

Twice the deputy halted to make

sure that he was not followed. Nothing loomed on his trail. At last he was at the stable door and easing quietly into the animal warmth of the stalls. Here the darkness was dense, but Carhart knew every inch of the building. He tramped with slow, noiseless steps for the feed room. As he pulled the latch a horse nickered, scenting a fresh feed of oats. At the sound, Carhart heaved into swift action. He yanked up his Norway ax with one hand as he yanked the door open with the other. Then a single lunge took him to Stair's bunk.

The boss teamster was raising up with a snarling yell. It expired in a gasping gurgle as a hand like an oak clamp caught his throat. Carhart grimly put on the pressure until he felt the man going limp. Then, as Stair choked convulsively for his breath, the deputy dropped the ax and groped for the man's breeches at the head of the bunk. In less than a minute Stair was trussed up with his own suspenders. He was now able to wheeze words.

"What th' 'ell and who are you?" he gasped out loudly through the blackness.

Carhart took a warning grip on Stair's bony neck again. "Keep quiet and you won't be hurt." He shaded his tone to a hoarse mutter and picked his words. "I'm Hall. You tell me what happened to Fournier, or I'll finish you like a rat."

"The greenhorn—" Amazement smothered fear in Stair for the moment. "You're not—the law shark who—"

"Just him," sounded the grim mutter. "You thought I was the fool, easy. Maybe so. But I've got you. Tell me where Fournier is—or you'll follow him."

The oaklike hand slowly tightened. The other brought up the ax.

The savage was claiming Bad-ax Carhart now. Crouching low over Stair, his breath was a hot gust. The blade of the Norway fanned the smothering blackness. Stair's chest heaved convulsively. A lightning shift of Carhart's hand choked the yell of panic.

"Red Sam's ax." The grind of ice was in the deputy's voice as he chanced the guess. "Blood on the blade—blood on the snow! *Where's Smoky Fournier?*"

The big-boned body went limp. Ed Stair lay in the darkness, shivering and sweating coldly with horrible fear. The Norway fanned him again. Ed Stair talked, like a man in a fever.

"I'll tell. Red Sam'll butcher me—like Fournier."

"Where's Fournier?" hammered Carhart.

"In the big eddy. I warned Red Sam you and the Murdock girl were in camp. He went crazy. Fournier had been threatenin'—but I swear I was back in the slash and Red Sam done it all—"

Stair's feverish voice broke into an incoherent mutter. The man was cracking with panic. Carhart decided to quiz him no more for the time being. The ferocity of the timber savage yielded to the cold caution of the trail tamer again. The law demanded solid evidence. Carhart knew where to get it now. Killer's luck had given him a clew in Red Sam's missing ax. Stair had told enough to start Carhart for the river.

He gagged the boss teamster with his own bandanna, then took a pair of trace chains from the stable and bound him solidly to the bunk. In another five minutes Bad-ax Carhart was tracking snowshoes into the sleigh-haul road, with a pole sled in tow.

AFTER an hour of grim, persistent labor Carhart recovered Fournier's body. With a ten-foot pike pole from the rollway tool cache lashed to a black-ash pole of equal length the deputy swung from the butt of the windfall and searched the depths of the black swirl of water between the sheer bank and a ragged crescent of ice. Again and again the pronged pole drove down, with Carhart exerting all his strength of shoulders and arms against the sucking whirl of the eddy. He straddled the sloping log, his knees gripping the crumbly wood. At every thrust, sweep, and pull, he swayed dangerously over the black water. Hard snow lashed his face, but he drove grimly on.

At last, when the certainty was gripping him that Stair had lied or else the body of Fournier had been swept on from the eddy, the prong of the pike pole caught and held. Keeping a tight grip with his mittened hands, Carhart braced himself and cautiously heaved on the pole. Slowly, hand over hand, he drew the burden to the surface, his body swaying from the hips with the eddy's circling sweep. Then, a short, hard pull. Carhart's right hand closed over a mackinaw collar. He heaved the dripping body of Smoky Fournier over the windfall and swung for the rollway.

Leaving his grisly load on the pole sled, Carhart prowled in the slash for a piece of dry, pitchy pine. His search ended at a slivered snag. Wrenching off a big splinter, he struck a match in the shelter of his mackinaw, and in a moment had a smoky torch blazing in the wind. Its gloomy light revealed how Fournier had been killed.

Carhart straightened and turned for the rollway. The fired pitch sputtered and snarled under the lash

of the wind, now thrusting a yellow tongue of flame into the snow swirls, then threatening to smother out. Shielding his light, Carhart stared down over the snow-covered logs, trying to form an image of the murderer of Fournier in his mind.

Red Sam, he knew, could bury the blade of a five-pound ax in the butt of a pine log with a sixty-foot throw, a feat which had been matched many times by Carhart himself. Red Sam had come down through the slash. Fournier, then, must have been facing the river to make a target, no doubt at the head of the rollway. Carhart could see the stricken man pitching down the logs.

Carhart made up his mind that the hunch was at least worth a play. He returned to the tool cache for a canthook; then he swung down the logs to the river ice. Dropping his torch, he pried out the bulwark logs. In a matter of twenty minutes he had rolled out enough timber for a look into the bottom of the pile.

Again the deputy lighted his torch. In a low crouch, he prowled to and fro over the bottom logs, searching every chink. On the third round a dull glitter caught his gaze. With a growl of triumph Carhart wedged a hand between two logs and brought up Red Sam's Norway ax. From haft to razor edge one bit was a rusty smear. Shreds of red-and-green cloth clung to the sides of the bit, threads slashed and caught from Fournier's mackinaw.

"Killer's luck," muttered Bad-ax to himself, as he headed back for the pole sled. "Marshal Swayne was right. Luck slips for every killer, somehow."

The work of the law was done. Now Carhart faced the necessity of keeping the mask of Bad-ax, the hellion, over this night's taming of the Sleet River trails.

HERB HALL was sleeping badly in the spare bunk in the kitchen shanty. It was not the hardness of his bed or the uproar of the storm that kept him wakeful. Hall was a town man, but he was no stranger to roughing it in the pine woods. What kept his nerves tense and his eyes wide open to-night was a gripping sense of a black phantom of evil brooding over the Sleet River camp. Herb Hall was a greenhorn in the woods, but he knew men—criminal men and their traits. He had felt the sneer and the menace under Sam Flick's hearty welcome. He had sensed the lie in Ed Stair's sullen explanation.

It was a formless but oppressive fear for the safety of Bessie Murdock that finally forced young Hall to quit the warmth of his bunk and ease out into the windy night. The same dread had kept him from pulling off his clothing when he turned in. Booted and mackinawed, Hall made for the shanty door. Once he stumbled with a heavy thud, but the snores of the cook were unbroken.

Hall shut the door behind him and pushed out of the blackness of the shed-roofed space between the two shanties. In the open the wind whipped snow into his eyes. Hall stood blindly for a moment, getting his bearings. Then, as he started toward the vague bulk of the van shanty, he glimpsed the shape of a man looming at his right. Fists up, Herb Hall whirled in his tracks.

BAD-AX had halted the pole sled and its grim load at the corner of the kitchen shanty. He was puffing heavily from the haul up the slope, and he rested against the log wall until he had his wind again. Then he straightened up for the next move in his masked game. This depended solely on the com-

mon sense and nerve of the young giant of a greenhorn, Herb Hall.

It would be a ticklish trick, Carhart realized, to rouse the lad up and get him out for a talk without also awakening the cook. But, even as he faced this problem, he saw that Herb Hall himself was solving it for him.

Carhart crouched sharply under the fist that was swinging like a maul for his head. Then, even as he hooked the lad's arm in an iron grip, he was thinking exultantly that Herb Hall was his man. For nerve, anyhow. If he'd only listen to sense.

"Chop it," Carhart commanded in a harsh whisper, as Hall struggled against him. "I'm a friend—of yours and Smoky Fournier's. Listen, now. I've got a killer hooked, if you'll haul along."

Carhart relaxed his grip and stepped back as Hall quieted down. "Who are you?" the lad demanded. He pressed close again, peering through the thick shadows.

"Keep your distance," Carhart ordered. "That's the first thing you got to know—that who and what I am don't count. I'm a jack, a friend of Martin Murdock's, who is here to prowl his killer down. That's enough for you." Carhart lowered his voice to a harsh, guarded mutter. "I've been doin' things. Ed Stair is trussed up and gagged in his bunk. He talked turkey. I found Fournier's body and the ax that finished him. Red Sam is the killer. The evidence is solid. But I'm out of it. The job is now yours. Are you game for it?"

For a moment Herb Hall was silent. The two men faced each other, with snow and night a blowing veil between them. Then:

"What do you want me to do?" said Hall steadily.

"Plenty. But most of all to take on the credit, or whatever you want to call it, for what I've already done. She's like this."

Briefly Carhart narrated his doings of the night. They left Herb Hall sort of gasping.

"But, man, I can't," he protested. "Nobody would believe it."

"Ed Stair already believes it," declared Carhart. "And when you march him into the bunk shanty, along with Red Sam's ax, and Fournier's body outside, the jacks will believe you plenty. I'll be one of them, in my bunk. I mean I'm out of this. Hear me?"

"I hear you." Hall was steady again. There was steel in his tone as he spoke on. "This means that Bessie's father is dead."

"Murdered," was Carhart's harsh reply. "It's plain that Red Sam killed him, with Stair and Fournier. You force a show-down with the grafters in the land office and you'll see why. Murdock was delinquent in his taxes. He won't show up to redeem his land. Flick is grabbin' it. That's all."

Hall groaned. "All that in the clean, free woods. But what are you getting out of this?" he demanded impulsively.

"The clean, free woods," said Carhart softly. "That sounds good. But no more questions. You're goin' down now for Ed Stair—goin' down the second time. Hear me? The second time."

THE trail tamer considered that a good night's work was done as, bootless, he entered the bunk shanty. From his bunk he would watch Herb Hall's play, as one of the Sleet River jacks. Then a deep, weary sleep, the sleigh haul to-morrow—and the clean, free woods.

So Bad-ax Carhart was thinking in his relaxing mood as he latched the door silently behind him. He turned noiselessly toward the dull glow of the smoldering camboose. As he did, a pitch pocket in a charred log exploded in a crackling burst of sparks. Flames flared toward the smoke hole. A rasping grunt sounded from a bunk on the far side of the camboose.

Carhart swore under his breath and held back in the smoky shadows of the wall. He was certain that the man who had roused up was Red Sam. No doubt the killer was sleeping light to-night. Anyhow, square-set shoulders were bulking from a bunk, and now a shaggy red head was silhouetted in the firelight. Red Sam, beyond any doubt.

And he was coming, his wool-socked feet padding on the packed earth floor, circling the camboose, his head jutting ominously as he peered into the wall shadow.

Carhart crouched, shielding his face behind his upturned mackinaw collar. His right hand jerked to his belt. The handle of the Norway ax swished free. Carhart gripped the blade, holding it close to his side, the hickory handle dangling. Red Sam swayed closer, the growl of a bear in his thick throat. Carhart took a sudden step ahead, to get clearance for a backward jerk of his right arm. The jerk brought the handle up like a spear. And like a spear Carhart drove the butt of the handle for Red Sam's square chin.

It struck with a smacking thud. Red Sam sagged with a windy grunt and sprawled, face down, on the floor. Carhart dove for his bunk after hooking up his boots in a swoop. He tossed boots and ax to the back of the bunk, yanked off his mackinaw, and crawled into the blankets. Pulling them over his

head, he kept one eye cocked on the door and on the quiet bulk of Red Sam.

Nerve-wrenching seconds passed. But finally, just as Carhart was wondering if Hall's nerve hadn't failed him, the latch clicked and lifted. The shanty door swung open with a crash.

Herb Hall stood on the threshold, a lantern in his left hand, the killer's ax in the other. The lantern glow fell on the unconscious form of the woods boss. The big lad stared in wonder, then in sudden alarm as chesty voices shouted out from the bunks.

The uproar grew as other lanterns flared and the jacks saw the camp boss stretched out, with the big greenhorn standing over him, swinging an ax. Then the lad got his nerve again. He whipped around and yanked Ed Stair inside. At the sight of the boss teamster with his hands chained behind him, the awakening jacks were momentarily struck dumb with amazement. Hall's resonant young voice rang out:

"Listen, you men! Smoky Four-nier was murdered. So was Martin Murdock. And Ed Stair has confessed that the killer was Red Sam!"

For a brief moment the men of the Sleet River camp gaped in stunned astonishment at the greenhorn from Menominee, at the cowering boss teamster, and at the motionless bulk on the floor. Then Red Sam stirred. As he scrambled to his knees he faced Herb Hall. The blade of his Norway ax swung before his suddenly terrified gaze. One bit shone. The other was dull with a smear of blood. As Red Sam shrank back, the jacks came to life. They pressed forward, with a rising mutter of threats.

Bad-ax Carhart was among them

now, glaring as wildly as the others. For a moment he feared a lynching, as some of the men pushed through the door and saw Smoky Fournier's body, slashed through the back, on the pole sled. But Herb Hall kept his nerve.

"It's my capture," he declared. "You'll get Red Sam's ax before you take him. There is law in the woods."

Right now the word of Herb Hall was the law on Sleet River. In the eyes of the Sleet River woodsmen he had forced a confession from Ed Stair, recovered Fournier's body in

a round-trip track through a storm, and had finally dropped Red Sam with an ax-handle smash to the chin. Such a greenhorn was somebody to respect, even by veteran woodsmen.

Bad-ax regarded the scene with grim satisfaction. He stared woodenly whenever Hall shot a searching gaze through the crowd. There was no glory for him, and he wanted none. Bad-ax listened to the wind in the pine boughs.

"Clean and free again," mused the timber savage.

That was the answer to the call in his heart.



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A "crook" takes
Mournful for
a rough "ride."

"YOU DONE ME

By Charles Wesley

CHAPTER I.

TRAILER.

AS "Mournful" Martin sat his horse and looked at Bob Wiley's ranch house, he was sure no one was in it. Except for four horses in a small corral, he found no sign of life outside, either.

Mournful was disturbed. At Wiley's request he had come over here to see how Sam Tate was getting along. Sam was a handy man

on Wiley's ranch, and Wiley had heard nothing from him for three days. Having lately married Dorothy Butler, Wiley had taken up his headquarters at the Butler place. Mournful thought that, since Bob had so many other things to think of, he was a pretty good fella for having thought of Sam at all.

Mournful hoped that Sam wasn't lying dead in that house. Sam was old, and Mournful knew that old men sometimes quietly fold up.

Taking out his gun, Mournful ex-



WRONG!"

Sanders

amined it and returned it to its holster. It was just possible old Sam had got into some kind of a jam.

Keeping his eyes on the house, he sent his horse forward slowly. He came up between the house and a shed back of it. He found by a single glance that no one was in the shed. Dismounting, he went up to the kitchen door, stood close to it, and listened intently. There was no sound from within.

"Hey, Sam!" he called.

No response. Finding the door

unlocked, Mournful pushed it open and stood in the doorway. There were unwashed dishes on the table and one unwashed pan on the stove. Either Sam had been taken sick and was now lying in his bedroom or he had departed hastily after a meal. Mournful knew this, because, in past visits to the house, he had seen that Sam was meticulous in the performance of his household duties. Sam couldn't ride much any more and the housework was his chief task.

Mournful went to Sam's bedroom. The bed had been slept in, but had not been made. That was additional proof that Sam had left hastily.

In that situation the only thing left to do was to look for sign outside. Mournful found sign as soon as he began to hunt for it. The sign confirmed his fear that Sam was in some sort of jam. Not so long ago four horses had been between the house and the shed. They had been spirited horses, Mournful decided, and they had had an early-morning friskiness.

Mournful guessed that they had been ridden in here soon after they had been saddled, and they probably had been saddled at dawn. Two hoofprints showed that one of the horses had reared. Mournful could see him stretching himself toward the sky. The indentations from his hind hoofs were deep, and ahead of those were other indentations made by the front hoofs as the animal had dropped down. About this sign there was other sign made by horses which had whirled and danced.

Well, Sam hadn't come out of the house on a horse. Mournful therefore went up the step and looked at the ground. The earth immediately beyond the step had been packed by the feet of people who had sat upon the step. Farther on the earth was softer. There Mournful saw the imprints of two heels.

Stepping down, he walked up to these and examined them. He believed that Sam had stood just there, then had started back. The imprints of the soles were faint, of the heels rather deep. It looked as if Sam might have thrown his body back to avoid a blow. Mournful saw that, balanced on his heels, he had twisted about. One heel had made almost a ring.

Walking slowly toward the corral, Mournful found footprints leading to it. They were similar to the prints made near the house, and Mournful believed they had been

made by Sam's boots. The prints led into the corral, but not out from it. They were replaced by the marks of a horse's hoofs. The reading of that was easy enough. Sam had walked into the corral, and had ridden a horse out.

The hoof marks led to a corner of the corral. There they were joined by other marks which led from the house. Again that was easy reading. The men who had sat horses between the house and the shed had ridden to the corner of the corral and had met Sam there. Following the confusion of marks for a little way, Mournful found that five horses had been ridden away from the corral. Those five riders would be Sam and four other men.

One other fact was disclosed to Mournful. The departure of those men had been in a certain order. One man had ridden by himself. Two of the others had ridden on one side of him and two on the other side. In each case one of these riders was behind the other. Therefore it looked as if Sam had gone away under guard.

Mournful now had about as good an idea of the arrival of those four horsemen and their departure and Sam's as if he had witnessed it.

Well, he would have to find out where old Sam had been taken. The odds would be four to one, but they would have to remain so. Mournful had no time to go back to Butler's to get help. He had no inclination to do so either. Odds of four to one weren't so bad.

OUT on the flat Mournful lost the sign several times, but found it again after a while. When he had covered two miles, he knew, from the broken sign, that the riders were headed toward the mountains. He guessed then that the visit

of those riders had to do with Wiley's cows. The cows were still in the mountain pastures, awaiting the round-up.

So Mournful headed directly toward the mountains. He rode at an easy lope, so that he was able to pick up the sign when it appeared. He came at last to the foothills. There were two draws leading into the hills. One draw was rather wide, the other narrow. The wide draw would be used by men going into the hills on legitimate business, because it was the easier to ride into. Mournful just wondered whether these riders wouldn't have picked the narrow draw. They would be so inclined, he believed, if they were pulling some sort of trick.

He therefore rode toward the narrow draw. Ten feet from it he dismounted and went to it on foot.

"Ol'-timer," he informed himself, "you still got a good guess or two in your system. You guessed which draw them fellas would pick. Now keep on guessin' correct. One bad guess might get you into trouble."

For he saw in front of the draw prints which proved that the riders had stopped there. The sign out on the flat had indicated that those riders had pressed their horses. That had taken some of the friskiness out of the animals. They had been willing to stand while their riders probably conferred among themselves or questioned old Sam. Then one by one the horses had been sent through the draw. Familiar now with what he believed to be Sam's sign, Mournful saw that two riders had gone ahead of Sam's horse and two behind it.

Those men were keeping Sam under their eyes all the time. Mournful wasted no more thought upon the question of Sam's having been forced to come here or of his having come

of his own accord. There was every indication that he had been forced.

For a full minute Mournful stood and listened. There was no sound from beyond the draw. He guessed he might as well ride in. It was possible that the riders, gaining these foothills, had climbed one for a backward view. In that case they had seen Mournful arrive. If he was going to be held up, he might as well be in his saddle.

Returning to his horse, he mounted and rode slowly to the mouth of the draw. As slowly, he sent the horse into it. As the animal was about to poke its nose beyond the end of the draw it suddenly nickered. It was a low, liquid nicker, and Mournful was sure that the sound had not carried far; but he stopped the horse, leaned, and clapped a hand on its nose. There was no answering sound from beyond the draw. Mournful was sure, however, that there must be horses in there.

SLIPPING down softly, he advanced and looked out into a widening of the draw. This ran for perhaps a hundred feet and then turned abruptly. Just this side of the turn there were five riderless horses. One of the horses Mournful recognized as a roan which he had seen old Sam ride.

Undoubtedly those four men had gone into the extension of this wider draw and had taken Sam with them. They might be back at any minute, for Mournful did not believe they would leave their horses for long.

Having scrutinized the draw, Mournful looked up. The higher hills were just beyond him and farther on the mountains began. The elevation of the mountains was not much more than twice that of those

higher hills. Mournful had never been up there, but he supposed that the summer grass was sufficient to take care of Bob Wiley's handful of cows.

About to take his eyes from the elevation, he saw a sudden stir up there. A man at once came into view. He was followed by a second man. They stood facing the mountains. Mournful waited briefly for other men to appear, but none did. Mournful returned to his horse and backed it through the draw. At the outer end of the draw he dismounted and ran back.

He was puzzled by the actions of the two men. He couldn't guess why they had climbed the hills. They were not looking out over the way they had come, and they couldn't see the mountain pastures where Mournful supposed Wiley's cows to be. For a moment after Mournful's return, they looked up. Then they looked down. One man raised an arm and pointed below him. Then he extended the arm and pointed away from him. To Mournful it was as if he indicated a direction.

Dropping his arm, this man turned to the other. Mournful thought they talked together. Then the first man started to turn. He turned slowly as if he were giving whatever was beneath him a lingering scrutiny. Knowing that the second man would probably also turn, Mournful dodged back.

He knew he had a little time. Those two men would require several minutes to descend and to reappear at the spot at which they had left their horses. Mournful then decided that the mouth of the wider draw was about opposite that spot. If they had been ridden through the wider draw, the horses would have arrived where they now were.

Running back to his horse, Mourn-

ful led him along the bases of the hills till he came to the wider draw. Dragging his reins again, he stepped into this draw. The horses were almost immediately within his sight.

And fifty feet beyond the horses, their sides to Mournful as they gazed up the hillside, were two men. Mournful saw that they were awaiting the return of the other two. Mournful's eyes went beyond them. Leaning against the wall of a hill was old Sam. Old Sam's hat was pulled over his eyes.

Mournful believed that, from beneath the brim, Sam was intently watching those two men.

CHAPTER II.

LISTENER.

MOURNFUL looked behind the two men. The hills there were lower and they were devoid of vegetation. Their slighter eminences would not be difficult to reach, but their barrenness would offer no shelter to a climber. However, Mournful decided to take the chance. He would have to hear what those men said to each other when the absent two rejoined the others. All Mournful had to go on, about Sam, was Sam's watching those two men. Sam's scrutiny might mean anything. It might be merely hopeful or merely expectant.

Into Mournful's mind had come a thin ray of suspicion. It was born of Mournful's knowledge that temptation may come to any man. He had to remember that old Sam, after a life of hard work, was poor.

Leaving the draw, Mournful found that he could ascend an outside hill without trouble. His horse, he found, was standing quietly. It would probably stand quietly for some time unless disturbed. So Mournful went up the first hill.

Crossing it, he discovered that its wall dropped down a dozen feet. Sliding down, he was still a considerable distance above the level upon which the men stood, and he was confronted by a steeper hill. This, however, had rocky outcroppings. By using these as handholds, he was able to gain the summit. Up there other hills ran in undulations to the hill which was his objective.

Going as far back as possible, so that he should remain out of sight of the men if either should look up, Mournful went up and down till he was above them. Then, on his stomach, he crawled forward. Presently he thrust his head beyond the rim of the hill.

Almost as if timed, the two men who had been on the other hill came into view. They were fifty feet from the other two, and as they advanced Mournful looked beyond them. He saw that they were emerging from a blind draw. It had a grassy floor and from the condition of the grass Mournful believed that there was water somewhere inside.

And all along the floor Mournful could make out groups of cows lying down, their appetites for water and grass apparently satisfied for the time being. He thought that there were about a hundred cows in all and he had a notion that other cows were beyond these.

As he was about to withdraw his eyes, some of the cows raised hind quarters lazily and came to their feet. Mournful could read their brand—a Flying W—and he knew that those were Wiley's cows.

Below him there was now the sound of voices. He looked down. The four men had drawn together, leaving old Sam where he was. Sam was leaning forward to hear what the men would say.

One thing about Sam struck
COM—8A

Mournful forcibly. He didn't seem to be a bit worried. He was waiting, with apparent coolness, the result of the men's conference.

"I guess the ol' fella has give us the right direction," one man said. "Far as we could see f'm the hill, we c'n drive them cows out the way he said. Gosh, the shape they're in we c'n be miles f'm here by sun-down."

"Well, le's get started," another man said.

As if moved by a common impulse, all four men turned and stared at Sam, who did not stir. Once before Mournful had heard Sam say that it didn't matter a hell of a lot what happened to him, but now it seemed to matter a great deal. After a moment of inaction he slowly straightened up and took a step toward the four men.

"Stay where you are, ol'-timer," one of the men ordered.

As Sam stopped, he spread his hands in a downward gesture. To Mournful that gesture seemed to hold a plea. There wasn't the slightest defiance in him. All the hardness which Mournful had admired in him in the past had vanished.

Mournful could come to no decision about that. It was very puzzling. Sam, Mournful knew, wasn't easily cowed. He had lived too long, had passed through too many dangerous experiences. And yet, after that one gesture, he seemed like a broken old man. Even the glance which had been so intent had become a wavering thing.

THE four men put their heads together. They talked long and earnestly. Then one walked up to Sam and pulled a paper from his pocket.

"You signed this paper, didn't you?" the man asked.

Sam nodded.

"An' you're Robert Wiley?"

Again Sam nodded.

Mournful barely suppressed a betraying exclamation of amazement. Sam, posing as Bob Wiley, was posing as the owner of the cows! By now Mournful knew that the men were going to drive the cows away. It looked as if they believed they were buying them from the owner!

The man who had spoken to Sam seemed to prove this. From an inside pocket he produced a small book and a stub of pencil. He wrote in the book briefly. Then he handed it and the pencil to Sam.

"Sign your name," he ordered.

Sam wrote in the book. Mournful saw that he wrote at the bottom of a page. Therefore he wrote below what the man had written. Mournful guessed that he was signing a name. The lanky puncher watched the up and down movement of that pencil. Too many movements! Sam hadn't written "Sam Tate." Mournful believed he had written "Robert Wiley."

The man took back the book and the pencil and returned them to his pocket. From the same pocket he drew out an envelope and handed it to Sam. Sam turned it over. Mournful saw that it was not sealed. Sam looked within.

"Why, there's on'y blank paper in here," he said.

"Blank paper?" the man repeated. "You're crazy. The amount of money in that envelope is wrote on the outside of it. The amount inside corresponds to a cent to what is wrote on the outside. You ain't doubtin' me, are you, ol'-timer?"

Sam sadly shook his head and put the envelope into a pocket. The man turned about to his companions. Sam put a timid hand on his arm.

"Mister," Sam said, "you ain't

keepin' your agreement with me. When I agreed to sell you these cows, I was to get cash. I——"

"You're gettin' cash—in the envelope! Now shut up!"

Mournful's heart sank. He conjectured that old Sam had entered into a raw deal and that he was now being betrayed as he had betrayed Bob Wiley.

"Well?" said the man sharply to his companions.

"Not here," one of the other men said. "Hell, that'd be silly. I been tryin' to figger this thing an' I ain't got nowhere with it. We gotta be smooth about it."

They all bent their heads and went into a study. Mournful thus had a chance to observe them closely. Without doubt they were all punchers, but there was something strange about them. They were somehow different from ordinary men of the range. Crooks! That was it, Mournful told himself. They were not men concerned with handling cows legitimately; they were used to cooking up schemes. Mournful sensed that difference.

It therefore looked as if old Sam had stepped into a great deal more than he had counted on.

For a long time those men were motionless, except that now and then, one by one, they looked at Sam as if Sam himself might order their thoughts. Sam, over there all alone, merely drooped. He seemed very old. No matter what he had done, Mournful was sorry for him. Mournful feared he had got himself into a trap by departing, under temptation, from the path of honesty.

PRESENTLY one of the men detached himself from the others and began to pace up and down. He was a blond, heavy man. He soon stopped near Sam and

stared at him. He took off his hat as if its removal would help him to think. Mournful saw that he had a wide, ugly face, with a loose, cruel mouth. How had Sam got hisself hooked up to a man like that? Sam was a pretty good judge of men.

All of a sudden the man squared his shoulders. He laughed and slapped a thigh with his hat. The other men looked at him.

"Well, I got it," he said. "You fellas is dumb. Where's this ol' man's gun?"

One of the other men produced a gun and held it out. The blond man went swiftly over to him and took the gun. He broke it and examined it. Apparently it was loaded to his satisfaction. He snapped the cylinder shut and stood looking at the gun. Then he turned and looked slyly at one of the other men. That man was the youngest of the four. He was not long out of his teens, Mournful thought; and he wasn't so sure of himself as the others. He tried to bear the first man's scrutiny without appearing to notice it, but he couldn't do it. Mournful saw him stir uneasily.

"I do b'l'ave you could do this job better'n any of the rest of us," the first man stated. "In fact, I think it's just the job for you."

"What job?" the young man faltered.

"This here," said the other, patting the gun in his hand, "is this ol'-timer's gun. What if the ol'-timer was found lyin' here dead when somebody rides in lookin' for these cows? He'd be—"

The man stopped as if a brilliant idea had clutched him and stilled his speech. "Oh," he cried, "I get better an' better." He wheeled to the man who had pocketed the book. "Here, gimme that book," he ordered.

When that man had passed over

the book, the other opened it and tore out several leaves. He walked up to Sam and stuffed the leaves into Sam's shirt pocket. Sam did not move.

"When the ol'-timer is found dead, the bill of sale an' the receipt for the money will be on him," the man explained. "Course, whoever finds him will be puzzled that he an' not the people he sold the cows to has them papers, but that won't be our worry. The more they're puzzled the better off we'll be. Can't you see an honest cowman sayin' that we bought the cows all right an' that this ol' fella got conscience struck after we had drove the cows off? The honest cowman'll be our friend if it comes to a show-down. By gosh, honesty pays, though sometimes it don't know who it pays."

He turned slowly back to the young man.

"Come an' get this gun," he ordered. "An' use it!"

"Use it?"

"Put it into this ol'-timer's hand and press it against his chest. Pull the trigger. As he falls, keep hold of his hand so his fingers will be around the gun when he's found. Drop down with him, keeping hold of his hand. Let his fingers fix themselves around the gun. See what I mean? Ain't it neat?"

For sheer brutality Mournful had never listened to anything like that. As Robert Wiley, Sam appeared to have sold Wiley's cows. Now he was to be murdered with evidence of the sale on his person. These men, if they were caught, could swear that they had bought the cows from a man they supposed to be their owner. They might even declare, in astonishment, that Sam must have robbed them of the bill of sale and the receipt.

For sheer brutality that younger

man had apparently never listened to anything like that either. He could not stomach it. In what Mournful supposed to be a panic, he sprang back and his hand dropped to his gun. His panic prevented a sure draw. Besides, the blond man had Sam's gun in his hand. There was an explosion. The younger man dropped with a bullet in his chest. The blond man faced the other two.

"I think I'll just ask for volunteers for this job," he said, Sam's gun still in his hand.

There was silence. Mournful waited for one of the men to volunteer. It was possible that that big blond man would shoot still another of his companions. Mournful had no objection to the odds being still further reduced.

But after a moment of hesitation, one of the remaining men moved toward the blond man, a hand outstretched. Mournful thought he was going to accept Sam's gun and execute Sam with it.

Mournful pointed his gun down at the blond man.

CHAPTER III. INTERFERER.

THE man who had moved toward the blond man stopped in front of him. He was much smaller than the blond man. Yet Mournful believed that he was made of better stuff. That might have risen somewhat from the fact that he was swarthy, with dark hair and heavy dark brows above eyes almost black.

For a moment the two men regarded each other. The second man's face was grim; the blond man smiled. It was not, Mournful thought, a sincere smile. It seemed to hold derision..

"Foster," the second man said,

"you've acted a good deal like a king ever since you an' the rest of us got together. You seem to think none of the rest of us has any nerve. I'll show you how good my nerve is. Gimme that gun an' in a minute you'll see that ol' fella layin' on the ground stiff, with that gun in his hand just like you want it to be."

Foster did not hand Sam's gun to the other man. Instead he thrust out the hand that held it and its muzzle went into the other man's stomach. A blazing look came into the dark man's face, then quickly died. He became motionless. He could control himself, Mournful saw.

"Mebbe you got plenty nerve, Woods," Foster snarled, his grin gone. "What you lack is brains. You thought I wasn't watchin' you, huh? Hell, I knowed three days ago that you an' me would hafta have a show-down soon. Well, this is the show-down. Put up your hands!"

Woods could only put up his hands. The dead man on the ground was an example of what would happen to him if he disobeyed.

"Gimme that rope, Sims," Foster ordered.

Sims was the oldest of the trio now left. He, too, was a little man, and Mournful saw that he was easily cowed. Foster had apparently established himself, and this man was too helpless to question Foster's authority. He was slight and sandy, and tremendously bowlegged. His spirit, Mournful thought, was as washed out as he seemed to be physically.

Sims turned and picked up a rope which was lying behind him. Mournful understood that this man Foster was forehanded. When he had come in here, he had brought a rope. Probably he had believed that he would have use for it with Woods.

Sims walked around Woods and gave the rope to Foster.

"Put your gun on him, Sims," Foster ordered.

Sims poked his gun into Woods's back. Foster plucked out Woods's gun and dropped it on the ground.

"You gonna string me up?" Woods asked, and there was a slight tremor in his voice.

Foster, Mournful now saw, enjoyed cruel acts. Once more he grinned and his grin was genuine. It drew his lips so far back that yellow, decaying teeth were disclosed. The canine teeth were like a dog's.

"String you up?" Foster repeated. "Hell, no! I'm gonna let you die peaceable. Well, kinda peaceable. It'll all depend on you. I'll make an example of you."

He slipped the loop of the rope over Woods's head and drew the loop tight. Walking around Woods, he wrapped him with the rope. Then, unfastening the man's handkerchief, he gagged him.

Woods's legs were free enough to permit him to hobble, and Foster ordered him to the hillside beyond Sims. There Woods turned. The movement brought him face to face with Foster. Foster immediately sent his right fist against the side of Woods's jaw. Woods was so tightly bound that he could not collapse. As he leaned, Foster struck him again, a terrific blow. Woods went down like an unbending tree, his head striking the hard ground with a good deal of force. He lay still.

THESE brutal acts had created a new mood in Foster, a mood of oily cajolery. Still grinning, he turned to Sims.

"I'd take care of that ol' man myself, on'y I know you wanta do it," he said. "I wouldn't keep no pleasure f'm you, Sims."

"That's all right," Sims said. "I'll do it. Course, I'll do it! Glad to do it for you, Foster."

"For me? For all o' us, don't you mean, Sims? We're all in the same boat, ain't we?"

"Shore. Oh, shore. All in the same boat. You know I wouldn't go against you, Foster."

Foster handed Sam's gun to Sims. "We've wasted enough time," he said significantly.

Sims started toward Sam, who came erect. That old man, Mournful saw, would not plead. He would meet death with a high head and with defiance in his eyes. For the moment he was the Sam whom Mournful knew.

Mournful realized that he would have to act promptly. Sims would not delay in the execution of Sam. His attitude showed that he disliked the job, but he would not resist Foster.

Mournful's gun was still pointed down into the bowl. He aimed it at Foster's heart. The lanky puncher was disgusted. He had, in his time, gone up against many brutal men, but he believed that Foster took the prize for brutality. Mournful's conscience would not have hurt him much if he had sent a bullet into Foster's heart. Instead, he called down to the men

"We got you covered. Make one move an' away you go, hightailin' to hell."

The two men showed the difference in their make-up. Foster went rigid. His pride, Mournful believed, flamed in him. His feeling seemed to be resentment that any one should have the insolence to interfere with him. Sims drooped, then swiftly crouched, as if he shrank together to make of himself as small a target as possible.

Foster lifted his head and looked

up at Mournful and the steady hand with the gun in it.

"You said 'we,'" he snarled. "You are alone up there."

What difference that made to a man with a gun aimed at his chest Mournful couldn't see. His increasing disgust hardened his face.

"Think I am?" he snapped. "Well, I reckon that's in line with your gen'rul thinkin'. Both you an' that other fella put up your hands an' walk over to that hill an' stick your noses into it. You c'n entertain yourselves by nosin' a coupla holes in the rock."

"I won't do it!" Foster declared. "We're peaceable cowmen, here on business. You ain't got no right to hold——"

Mournful put a bullet through the man's hat, so far below the crown that it must have stirred his hair.

"I'll give you a haircut an' it won't be a pretty one," said Mournful. "I'll even take some scalp with the hair. Do what I tell you!"

Seething with rage, Foster obeyed. Sims dropped Sam's gun and followed him. By dropping the gun the man seemed to want to prove to Mournful that his obedience was the real thing.

"Sims," Mournful called, "drop your own gun. Then take Foster's an' drop it. I gotta slide down this hill. I'll come slow. If either of you makes a move, I'll shoot."

Foster turned his head and glared at Sims. Sims hesitated, then dropped his gun and plucked out Foster's and dropped it. The guns fell near the bound man, but he was still unconscious from Foster's terrific blow.

"I'll kill you for this, Sims," Foster threatened.

"What could I do?" Sims whined. "Hell, a gun ain't no good to you anyway."

MOURNFUL started slowly down the hillside. It was rather steep and his progress was slow. Once he dislodged a stone and it clattered down. Foster swiftly turned his head. He saw Mournful still making a slow descent, but Mournful's gun was on him. He turned back to the hill.

Gaining the level, Mournful walked up behind Foster and Sims.

"What're you tryin' to pull off?" Mournful asked.

"Why, this fella Wiley sold us some cows. We come to get 'em. What objection you got to that?"

Mournful thought Foster expected him to deny that Sam was Wiley. He wouldn't do it. He would give Foster something further to think about.

"Oh," Mournful said, "this ol' fella tried to pull one on you, did he?"

"That was it. He wanted to get our money an' keep the cows f'm us."

"The ol' hellion!" Mournful exclaimed. "Well, you got the cows all herded ready fer a drive, ain't you?"

"Yes, yes. All we wanta do is to get on our way. We want to cover as much ground as we c'n by night-fall."

Foster started to turn. Mournful prodded him with the gun. Foster resumed his former position. Mournful looked down at Woods at his feet. Woods's face was suffused with blood. There was a little stain near his head. His fall, Mournful supposed, had injured him. His breathing was difficult.

Foster let loose a flood of explanation which explained nothing. In different ways he said what he had said before. Under cover of that torrent, Mournful stooped and untied the knots which held the gag and the rope on Woods. He ran his

finger around under the rope, so that it should be somewhat loosed and permit Wood's blood to circulate more freely. It was merely an instinctive act of mercy on Mournful's part. He didn't want any man, crook or otherwise, to suffer unnecessarily.

Standing up, he interrupted Foster's stream of talk.

"Where was you gonna take them cows?" he asked.

"Why, to my ranch."

"Where's your ranch?"

"Why—why—er——"

"Oh, you got one of them 'why—why' ranches, have you? Well, I ain't intrusted in that kind of a ranch."

Mournful turned about to Sam. He had intended to speak gently to Sam, but he found the old man glaring at him. Sam, Mournful decided, was pullin' the stuff that a caught man sometimes pulled. He was trying to be virtuously indignant.

"What's all this mean, Sam?" Mournful asked sharply. "What you been tryin' to do with Wiley's cows?"

"You c'n go to hell, Mournful Martin," Sam cried. "What I do is my business an' none of yours."

Mournful stared at the old man. Sam was acting, speaking, as a crook would have acted and spoken. Mournful's heart sank. He could understand what *might* have happened to Sam. Bob Wiley, by marrying Dorothy Butler, had come into partnership in an outfit so big that it made his own outfit look pitifully small. He didn't need his few cows. Sam needed 'em—needed the money they would bring. Sam, Mournful guessed, had been wondering why he shouldn't share in the prosperity which had come to Bob Wiley.

Mournful sighed.

"Well, you gonna stand there all day?" Sam snapped.

By gosh, Mournful thought, there was dislike in Sam's voice. He was mad because Mournful had busted up his plans. Sam proved that he was at least mad.

"You make me sick!" he declared.

CHAPTER IV.

DAMN FOOL.

I AIN'T armed," Foster said. "C'n I turn around? I wanta talk to you, fella."

Mournful moved back and told Foster that he and Sims might turn around. He ordered them to keep their hands up.

Foster, when he had turned, studied Mournful. Sims regarded the ground. He seemed to think that since Foster had got him into this jam it was up to Foster to get him out.

"Why, you're on'y a puncher, ain't you?" Foster asked Mournful.

"On'y a puncher?" Mournful repeated. "Why, punchers is natcher's noblemen."

"Funny, ain't you?"

"You bet!"

"Look here, fella," Foster said earnestly. "You're delayin' me. I'm a very busy man. You're a puncher. You know a cowman ain't got no time to throw away. Now, I'll be reasonable. I——"

"It's kind of you to be reasonable," Mournful drawled. "It's a hull hell of a lot more'n I expected. I been watchin' you fer some time f'm up on that hill an' I ain't seen you do nothin' reasonable yet, 'less you call murder in cold blood reasonable."

"Murder? I didn't murder nobody. That fella would have killed me. Ain't a man got a right to perfect himself?"

"A *man* has, mebbe."

"You're tryin' to rile me."

"Gosh, no! You might git rough with me if I riled you."

"Well, I ain't never seen a puncher yet that had more'n forty cents four days after pay day. I——"

"Lemme see if I c'n guess what you're gonna say," said Mournful. "You're gonna say I could use some money. If I'll let you drive them cows outa here, you'll give me a nice piece of change. Honest, Foster, that stuff is raw. Ever' time I meet a crook, he pulls that. If I needed anything to show me that you're a crook, that offer would be it."

"I ain't made you no offer," Foster growled.

"Don't!" Mournful snapped. He glanced over his shoulder at Sam, who glared at him. "That ol' man ain't Bob Wiley," Mournful, returning to Foster, went on. "You know he ain't Bob Wiley. You've convinced yourself that you're a clever crook. You don't jest step out in the moonlight or the dew an' rustle cows. You cook up schemes that wouldn't impress a maverick sick with lonesomeness. Hell, fella, you ain't got no brains."

"Ain't I? Mebbe you'll find out if I ain't. How was I to know that fella wasn't Wiley." He looked beyond Mournful to Sam. "Ol' man," he contituted, his eyes threatening Sam, "didn't you say you was Bob Wiley?"

"Shore I did!"

"Of your own free will?"

"Cer'nly!"

A wave of brightness flowed over Foster's face. To Mournful he seemed overjoyed by Sam's responses, as if Sam had backed him up more than he had expected.

"Sam," Mournful called, "have you lost what little mind you had? Why, you didn't need to pull off nothin' like this. Wiley sent me lookin' fer you this mornin'. He was worried

about you. He said he was gonna look after ol' Sam. He said you had done your share of the work in this man's world an' he was gonna fix you so't you could take things easy. He spoke o' buyin' you a new suit o' clothes an' sendin' you to town fer a coupla weeks to let you spread yourself. Now you throw him down. I'm disappointed in you, Sam."

Sam laughed. He laughed so long and so loudly that Mournful again turned to look at him. By gosh, mebbe that ol' fella's mind had cracked. Ol' fellas, down on their luck, wasn't none too solid in their minds sometimes.

"Shore," Sam said when he had quieted his mirth, "Bob Wiley was gonna look after me. He was prob'ly gonna make me chief dishwasher over at the Butler ranch. That woulda been a step up for me! I'd had more an' better dishes to wash! I wouldn't be surprised if mebbe him an' his new wife would be gettin' some real chiny. Then if ol' Sam broke a dish he'd be breakin' somethin'. Nothin' like givin' a pore ol' fella somethin' good to break. Fella, I tol' you you made me sick—so sick I'm fit to die."

"Sam, Sam," Mournful expostulated.

"Sam, Sam," the old man mimicked.

SHAKING his head, Mournful turned back to Foster and Sims. "Mister," Sims whined, "Foster has got a lotta dough. I don't s'pose you got much. Why can't we dicker nice an' pleasant?"

"Where did Foster git his dough?"

"Why—why——"

"Why—why——" Mournful jeeringly echoed. "'Why—why' ranches an' 'why—why' dough."

"Sims, when I want you to do any

business for me, I'll let you know," Foster said. "Martin, do you know Wiley?"

"Wiley?"

"I c'n see he ain't no friend o' yours," Foster wheedled. "Why should you worry about him or his cows?"

"I reckon it must be because I'm a natcherl-born worrier," Mournful answered. "Seems like all I do is go around worryin'. Jest now I'm worryin' about what I'm gonna do with you."

"You can't do nothin' with me," Foster cried. "I c'n prove that ever'thing I've done has been on the level."

"Oh, I'll take your word fer that," said Mournful. "Gosh, I s'pose I'll hafta take you way over to the sheriff. I hate to take anybody to a sheriff. Me an' sheriffs don't get along so good."

"You smart Aleck," Foster ground out.

Mournful suddenly aimed his gun at Foster's chest again. He so disliked the fella that he was tired of fooling with him. Foster stiffened.

"I'll have the truth outa you," Mournful said. "When did you herd Wiley's cows inta that blind draw?"

"Yesterday an' the day before."

"Where was you gonna drive 'em to?"

"Why, to where we could dispose of 'em, o' course. We got a bill o' sale with Wiley's name on it."

"Wrote by ol' Sam."

"I don't know nothin' about any ol' Sam. That ol' man there is Bob Wiley, accordin' to his own say so. That's all I know."

Mournful could not decide whether Foster was telling the truth or not. The man had undoubtedly been in jams before. The fact that he was here, sound in limb, proved

that he had wiggled out of those jams. He might be expecting to wiggle out of this one. In any event he acted as if he would not be scared into an admission.

Again Mournful turned to Sam.

"C'mon, Sam," he said. "Straighten me out on this thing."

"Straighten you out?" said Sam scornfully. "Oh, you're crooked, are you? I allus thought so."

Mournful was now convinced that Sam was merely putting up a front. Sam must feel secure enough. He probably knew that Wiley would no more than regretfully reprimand him. Nothing serious could happen to him. However, Mournful was disappointed in him. A few words from him would have set Mournful straight.

"Wiley an' me is pretty good friends, Sam," Mournful said lamely. "A word f'm me to Wiley would fix—"

"Would fix me up," Sam inserted. "So you'd lie, would you, fella?"

"Sam, I'm off you fer life," Mournful declared. "You talk about *me* makin' you sick. Gosh!"

"I hope you get sick enough to die," Sam said viciously.

Mournful turned back to Foster and Sims. He found Foster's eyes on him, but the eyes were vacant. Foster appeared to be using another of his senses—his hearing. Mournful himself listened intently. He could hear nothing. Then light broke for him. Once more he covered Foster, and now his eyes were bitter, partly from what Sam had done and partly from his dislike of Foster.

"I jest thought of somep'n," Mournful said. "I was a fool not to think of it before. I guess I'm a fool fer foolin' with you. You got some more men, ain't you? They're with Wiley's cows. You been listenin' for them. A while ago you

said 'all of us,' an' I didn't tumble. Tell me the truth now, you sucker. I'm losin' my patience. Want me to blow you apart?"

"Who's gonna blow who apart?"

The voice had come from the top of that hill upon which Mournful had first seen the two men. Briefly Mournful kept his eyes on Foster. Foster crouched as if he expected Mournful would pull his trigger. Mournful couldn't do that. It would be murder of a sort and it wouldn't benefit him.

He looked up. Two rifles were pointed down at him. Beyond them was a pair of bare, shaggy heads. Those heads, Mournful saw, belonged to a couple of old-timers. Mournful knew that he could not fool with them. They were probably too old to do anything on their own hook. They looked at Foster for their living, their protection. They would wade through high water and dash through the flames of hell for him. Sometimes, Mournful knew, that sort of thing served better than loyalty.

Slowly, disgustedly, Mournful holstered his gun and lifted his hands.

"You damn fool," he murmured.

CHAPTER V. WATCHER.

THE two men came down from the hill. They paid no attention to Mournful. Their eyes were on Foster hungrily. Shaggy ol' men, thought Mournful, dumb ol' men. They were waiting for Foster's crumbs of praise. They did not depend upon Foster helplessly as Sims did; they fawned on him.

Foster gave them no crumbs. His eyes were on Mournful.

"We thought somethin' was

wrong, boss," one of the men said. "We knowed you wouldn't waste so much time here if somethin' had not happened. So we snuck up on the hill an' peeked over an' got this fella. You c'n depend on us, boss."

"This fella got me foul when I wasn't lookin'," Foster said.

There were two guns on the ground near him, but he wouldn't pick up one of them. Mournful guessed the vain man wanted to keep himself erect before his foe. He seemed to think that bending to pick up a gun would rob him of some of his dignity. Dignity, hell, thought Mournful. The sucker was merely bloated with his own conceit.

Foster turned to one of the men. "Gimme your short gun," he said.

The man handed the gun to him. He held it in his left hand. Then he began a slow advance on Mournful. He was, Mournful thought, like a stealthy, enraged animal. His head was bent so that the lower whites of his eyes showed and his lips were drawn back to disclose his yellow teeth.

Foster's stealthy advance carried him to within four feet of Mournful. His gun was aimed at Mournful and his eyes did not waver. At that distance of four feet he stopped.

Then Foster suddenly sprang. It was only a short hop, carrying the man to within two feet of Mournful. Foster had a long reach and he had only to throw out a hand to smack Mournful's face. As Mournful saw the blow coming, he threw his head to one side, so that the blow was light. Foster, however, followed that with a blow from his clenched fist. Since he had lowered his hand, this blow came up from the waist. It caught Mournful under the chin just as he was straightening his head.

Though his body rocked and his head whirled, he believed he might have kept his feet. However, he thought it best to fall. He seemed to go down heavily, but in reality he broke his fall by catching himself with a long, extended arm. Then he drew his body together and curled his arms about his head so that he might protect himself if Foster booted him.

Foster did not boot him. He stooped and snatched out Mournful's gun. Then he rose and turned to those fawning oldsters. Their servility must have been like wine to him. He wanted their praise.

"Neat work, boss," one of the men said. "Takes on'y one of your punches to put a man away."

"I'll say so!" Foster gloated.

"Whatcha want us to do with him, boss?" the other man asked.

Mournful had long ago learned that weak, servile men could be dangerous. Those two oldsters now were more dangerous than Woods, for instance. They not only would kill at Foster's order, but to get further into Foster's good graces they would offer to kill.

"I'd like to do plenty to him," Foster said, "but I guess I just gotta get rid of him."

He turned to Mournful again. Mournful knew that he was tempted to lose enough time to teach Mournful a lesson, but he decided against that.

The backs of the three men were now to Woods, the bound man. While Foster regarded Mournful, those two oldsters kept their eyes on Foster. Their mouths were half open. Their eyes had the dim eagerness of age. Mournful pitied them. Sometime they had been young men, strong men; now they were doddering old duffers, hanging to a brute for their keep.

Mournful now believed that Foster's cunning had returned. The man was deciding just what he should do with Mournful and Sam. It must seem to him that he was in complete control of the situation. Thoughts of gain must be uppermost in his sick mind. Mournful guessed that he was wondering how to dispose of his body so that it should not be found. He would take care of Sam as he had planned to do, but if Mournful lay dead near Sam too much suspicion would be aroused.

MOURNFUL shot a glance at Woods. He did not know just why he did that. It was the mere roving glance of a man taking in all the scene, since the scene might be the last which he would look upon.

As his eyes alighted on Woods, Mournful barely controlled a start. Woods had moved, so that he could look more fully at the backs of those three men. Finding that he was not observed, he moved a careful arm. That disclosed to him that his bonds were loose. He quickly pushed them down from his body, thereby freeing his arms. Twisting his head from side to side, he loosened the gag which Mournful had untied.

In that brief time Mournful decided that Woods was a good man gone wrong. Anyhow, he knew how to handle himself in an emergency. There was no blaze of hate in his eyes. They were cool and watchful. Raising his head, he caught sight of one of the guns near him. A quick smile of satisfaction came to his lips.

His right hand went out slowly.

"Well," Foster broke the silence, "you two fellas has been around here more'n I have. You c'n take this long man some place an' lose him. You c'n take Sims, too. I kinda

think Sims ain't gonna be of no use to me f'm now on. An' when I say I want you to lose them two, I mean I want you to *lose* 'em. I don't want nobody never to find 'em."

One of the old men walked up to Foster's side.

"Boss," he said, "this long man didn't come here afoot. He must have a horse some place. Le's get the horse, put him on it, an' take him up in the mountains. We c'n send him an' the horse over a canyon rim, an' if they're ever found, people'll think it was an accident. Sims, too, o' course."

"I was thinkin' o' that," Foster said quickly. "Go see where his horse is. Yes, I reckon that's the way I'll do it."

The two old men did not resent Foster's taking credit for the idea of one of them. So long as Foster was pleased, they were satisfied. They walked up to Mournful, and with a good deal of tugging heaved him to his feet. Mournful drooped between them for a moment and then as if dazed, lifted his head. He looked at Foster with half-opened eyes.

"What did you do to me, fella?" he muttered. "What'd you hit me with?"

Foster laughed. The old men chuckled.

"He hit you with his fist," one said. "Don't he pack a wallop?"

MOURNFUL raised a hand and ran it over his eyes. Beneath that cover he looked again at Woods. Woods had the gun in his hand and was slowly coming to his knees, the rope dropping from his body as he did so.

"Where's your horse, tall man?" one of the oldsters asked.

"At the end of the wide draw," Mournful answered.

The two men released him and

stepped back. They waited to see whether he would fall, but when he kept his feet, they trotted away and disappeared into the draw.

"Foster, you pup, stick 'em up!"

Woods, kneeling, was now facing fully toward Foster. At the sound of a voice which he thought silenced, Foster went rigid. A look of amazement dawned in his eyes. Mournful drew himself together. He did not know what Foster would do. He might, in a sudden rage, decide to get rid of Mournful at once.

But Foster wheeled. He still had his gun in his hand, and Mournful saw his elbow crook. There was an immediate explosion from where Woods knelt. Foster's hand went down. He took a backward step, wavered, and collapsed heavily.

Mournful ran to him and obtained his own gun. He aimed the gun at Woods. Woods's eyes were glued to Foster as if he thought Foster might rise. His gun was pointed at Foster's body.

"Don't move, Woods," Mournful ordered. "I got you covered. I done you—an' myself—a good turn by loosenin' that rope. Them two ol' men will be comin' back soon. We better be ready for 'em."

Woods looked up at Mournful.

"Whatever you say is all right with me," he stated. "You made a chance for me. 'Thout that chance I'd been dead in a few minutes. Foster don't think nothin' o' snuffin' out a life. I'll stick with you till we bag them ol' devils."

"I guess you better toss that gun out to me," Mournful said. And when Woods tossed it out he went on, to Sam, "Get it, Sam. Keep Woods covered."

As Sam took up the gun, Mournful ran toward the draw into which the two old men had disappeared. Peering into it, he saw that they were re-

turning, one of them leading Mournful's horse. That man was on the side toward Mournful and the other was still nearer.

Mournful waited till they came abreast of him. Then he poked his gun at them.

They stopped, halting the horse also. The two were not so bewildered but that they put up their hands. They turned ludicrously frightened faces to Mournful.

"You two oughta be in an ol' men's home 'stead o' gallivantin' around killin' people," Mournful said.

He took their guns and dropped them on the ground.

"Now get your horses an' ride hell fer leather outa here," he ordered.

The men fairly tottered to their horses, mounted them, and spurred them away, their scared faces turned back till they disappeared.

"I guess you ain't no sheriff's assistant," Woods said hopefully, when Mournful returned to him.

"Nope," Mournful agreed. "Where do you an' Sims go from here?"

"Oh, I dunno. I'm gonna get me a job."

"I dunno who'd give me a job," Sims put in.

"If you two wanta ride with me, mebber Wiley could fix you up."

"This ain't a trick?" Woods asked.

"Hell, I don't need to play no tricks on you now."

"I'll take a chance. Say, you wanta know what this was all about?"

Mournful looked over at old Sam. Sam was staring at him as belligerently as a fighting cock just released for combat. Mournful's thin smile went across his lips.

"I wanta know all about it," he said, "but not f'm you. I'd rather hear it f'm that ol' fella over there. I once thought he was my friend."

"Your friend!" old Sam cackled.

"Heh, heh. Hell, you don't know the meanin' of friendship. You're old an' dumb just like them two old fellas you let ride away."

"Jest the same," Mournful said, "you're ridin' with me to see Wiley. You been shunnin' Wiley. You can't shun him no more."

On the ride to the Butler ranch Sam drooped in his saddle, his eyes on the ground. Mournful supposed he was cookin' up a story for Wiley. Near the house Sam looked up. His face was flushed.

"Martin," he said, "I am a crook. You'll know it as soon as we see Wiley. By gosh, you will know it!"

CHAPTER VI. VICTIM.

BOB WILEY came out to meet them when they rode in.

Mournful explained that Woods and Sims were looking for jobs. Wiley sent them to the bunk house and told them they could talk to his foreman later. Mournful had brought in the two riderless horses and, dismounting, he dragged their reins and the reins of his own horse. Old Sam remained in the saddle.

"What happened, Mournful?" Wiley asked.

"I guess I'll let Sam tell it," Mournful answered.

"An' mebber Sam won't tell it!" the old man shrilled. "Bob, this here Mournful Martin wanted me to explain. There was the hull damn play right in front of his eyes an' he wanted me to explain. 'Magine! Bob, I was asleep in my bed las' night. I heard a noise outside an' got up. I seen sev'ral riders out in the yard. As I was peekin' through a window, one of 'em hailed the house. Well, what th' hell! The hail was open an' aboveboard. There wasn't nothin' to rouse my suspi-

cions. So I just pulled on my pants an' went to the door an' opened it—all unsuspecting."

"A fella that Martin got acquainted with to-day, a fella callin' hisself Foster, sent his horse up to the door. 'You're Bob Wiley,' he tol' me.

"'I ain't,' I said. 'I'm Sam Tate.'

"'Oh,' he says.

"'Before I could stir, he hops down, jams hisself into the doorway, an' pokes a gun into me middle."

"'You're Bob Wiley,' he says, 'an' you're gonna sell us some cows.'

"'You're crazy,' I says. 'I ain't Bob Wiley an' I don't own no cows.'

"'You could be Bob Wiley, couldn't you?' he says.

"'Why, no,' I says. 'I couldn't if I tried for a year. Bob Wiley is young an' he has just took a wife, an' if he was here he'd shoot your heart out.'

"'Well, the sucker laughed an' tol' me to get dressed. I got dressed an' he tol' me to get a horse. I got a horse an' he tol' me to ride. He was a great fella to tell a man things. Well, we rode over to the foothills an' this fella tol' me an' the other fellas to stop. We stopped an' sat our horses there till sunup—an' me 'thout no breakfast or even coffee, an' my sleep all busted.

"'Come with me,' Foster tol' me.

"I went with him. We rode through a draw an' come to a blind draw. He tol' me to have a look. I had a look an' seen your cows, Bob. Them fellas had brought 'em down f'm the mountain pastures an' herded 'em into that draw.

"'Them's Bob Wiley's cows,' I said. 'If you was figgerin' on drivin' 'em off, you better figger again. You'll have a bunch of hell benders on the back of your neck before you have gone ten miles.'

"'Why, no, Mr. Wiley,' he says.

'You're sellin' them cows to me. I'm gonna pay you for 'em.'

"Well, I didn't know whether he was crazy or I was. I tol' him again I wasn't Bob Wiley. He dragged his gun an' shoved it into my stummick. He shoved it in deep an' it wasn't no pleasant sensation. It's bad enough to have a gun shoved into your stummick when you've been eatin' reg'lar, but when your stummick is empty, you feel like the long bar'l of that gun is goin' right through to your spine. Well, I got mad. I asked Foster what in hell he thought he was tryin' to pull off? He got mad then. He got madder'n I did, 'cause a crook c'n get madder'n a white man, seems like. He tol' me I was dumb.

"Then he explained to me what he was aimin' at. He was gonna drive off them cows. The way he was gonna go wasn't quick travelin' an' mebbe he'd be caught. He hadn't got no ambition to be strung up as a rustler. He'd been watchin' your place ever since you left to come over here, Bob. I was gonna be Bob Wiley. Then if he was caught, he'd say he'd bought the cattle f'm me, an' would show a bill of sale. He figgered that that'd confuse whoever caught him, to say the least."

"You could have testified against him," Wiley said.

"Not me! I was gonna be dead. Mournful Martin, when he come on the scene, lined hisself up to be dead, too. Killin' men seemed to be a kind of a pastime for them fellas. I never seen an outfit quite so bloodthirsty.

"Well, what could I do? All I could do was to wait an' agree an' see if them fellas wouldn't slip up an' give me a opportunity to put 'em in a trap. I was still waitin' an' hopin' when Martin showed up. The sucker took ever'thing for granted.

He thought I was th'owin' you down, Bob. He thought I'd got tired o' havin' nothin' an' was sellin' your cows for what them fellas would gimme."

"What happened after Mournful arrived?" Wiley asked.

"I'll let him tell that," Sam said slyly. "The story will need some patchin'."

MOURNFUL told the story without "patchin'" it.

"Well," Wiley said, "Mournful doesn't know you as well as I do, Sam."

"I was sure you'd b'l'ever me, Bob," said Sam. "Didn't I tell you Wiley'd b'l'ever me, Martin?"

"Oh, shore," said Mournful.

"An' that bet stands?"

Mournful, of course, didn't know what bet Sam was talking about, but he wouldn't let on to Wiley. He was willing to permit Sam to get away with anything if it'd ease the ol' fella's mind.

"Shore," he repeated.

Sam turned to Wiley again. When he spoke, his tones were sweet and his eyes were soft.

"Y' see, Bob," he purred, "Martin don't know what fast friends you an' me is. Comin' over here, he tol' me I oughta be ashamed o' myself for tryin' to th'ow you down. I tol' him I hadn't th'owed you down. I explained to him ever'thing that had happened. He looked at me sour.

"You don't expect me to b'l'ever that, do you, ol' man?" he asked.

"His lack o' faith in me, when faith is all that keeps men clean, riled me. The way he called me ol' man riled me more.

"Fella,' I says to him, 'I'll bet you ten dollars that Bob Wiley takes my

story 'thout no question.' An' you took it, Bob. Martin owes me ten dollars."

"Oh, you don't wanta collect a bet like that, Sam," Wiley said. "If Mournful had just knowed you a little better, he——"

"He doubted me," Sam broke in. "I can't bear to be doubted. If Martin's a man, he'll pay the bet."

Sam turned to Mournful and winked. Oh, well, thought Mournful, th' ol' fella was feelin' better. He'd go along with him, in the joke. Taking out a thin roll, he handed a bill to Sam. Sam tucked it away.

"Now you an' me is friends again, Mournful," Sam said. "So I'll help you turn these horses in."

Smiling, Bob Wiley went back to the house where his wife was. Sam and Mournful rode down to a corral and turned in the horses.

"Now you c'n gimme back that ten, Sam," Mournful said. "I ain't got no tens to th'ow away."

"Shore, I'll give it back to you, Mournful," Sam said.

Mournful held out a hand. Sam backed away.

"You didn't lemme finish," Sam said. "You're a great man, Mournful. Ever'body thinks as much of you as you think of yourself, an' that is sayin' plenty. Well, it would not be fittin' for a poor ol' thing like me to let you make a mistake. You thought I was a crook, so I gotta be a crook. I'll return that ten to you when hell freezes over an' you walk back on the ice to get it!"

"Why, you are a damn ol' crook," Mournful declared.

"Course I am!" Sam chuckled. "An' who made me a crook? Fella, you done me wrong—ten dollars' worth of wrong!"





The FORTUNE MAKER

By Cole Richards

A monkey makes the business.

SMEE clanged the compound bell like a man gone mad. Every Indian on the hemp plantation felt the coming sting of leather lash or the stocks' rough clamps. The men already in the stocks, Dominic Gomez among them, had visions of solitary confinement and starvation. Smee ran Plantation No. 7 of the Yucatan Sisal Co. with an iron hand. Through the hemp rope from Plantation No. 7 ran a thin red strand of the Indians' blood. Smee despised the peons, and, despising them, pocketed half of the fifty centavos a day the company paid them. He increased

this sizable fortune by selling one third of the crop to independents.

It was his own crime, not theirs, that caused him to clang the compound bell. A small stone may break a large jar, so runs the Indian proverb. Smee's plan for skipping out with his ill-gotten gains was broken by the small circumstance of an auditor's arrival a day too soon. The visitor, an American named Waller, had sent a messenger ahead. Smee had an hour to get rid of evidence of his brutalities and thefts. The clamor of the compound bell was half a welcome, half a knell. If the auditor were hot, dusty, and

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anxious to get away after a glance at books and crop—if he accepted Smee's word for the contents of a certain "lost" ledger—he would ride away safely. If the auditor were suspicious, he would have to be killed.

Smee's round, skulking shoulders twitched. His shifty eyes rolled under low brows.

"Dismantle stocks and lashing pole!" he shouted when he had the attention of the compound workers. "Prisoners go to Field 70." This was the field farthest from the compound. "If one of you says more than '*Buenas días*' to the señor who is coming, it'll mean fifty lashes after he goes. Sabe?" He got no answer from the brown men who cowered under their straw sombreros and dug holes with bare toes. "Sabe?" he screeched.

"*Si, señor,*" Dominic Gomez, in the stocks, answered for all of them.

The plantation became an ant hill disturbed by a brutal foot. Lashing post and stocks were hauled on mules into the jungle. Prisoners were hustled out of the dark, solitary hut. The place took on the air of a model plantation, run efficiently and honestly.

A guard released Dominic's legs and wrists from the wooden stocks. Dominic stood up gingerly. He flexed his arms and stepped up and down to take out the cramps. A plucky smile gleamed like ivory in his mahogany face. Slack cotton pants were fastened at his slim waist by a twisted rope. Muscles rolled on his back. He had not swung a machete on sisal hemp since his fifth year for nothing.

The guard looked at Dominic with mixed envy and disapproval. Dominic had dared hit Smee with a bunch of sisal when Smee tried to trample his monkey. Dominic had done

what every Indian on the plantation longed to do, and what did it bring him? Punishment.

"The stocks are not hammocks, no?" the guard remarked. "Next time you will not strike the señor when he kicks your monkey."

Dominic's jaw set stubbornly. "The monkey is my fortune maker. I said to Señor Smee, 'I wish to make a fortune as the *Americanos* do.' He said, 'Get yourself a monkey and hand organ.'" Dominic repeated this solemnly. Neither he nor the guard had a glimmer of Smee's sarcasm. If the señor said it was so, then it was so, to those simple Mexicans.

"I went to the jungle," Dominic continued. "I captured a monkey. It makes a year now that I have taught Mono tricks. When the señor kicked him, I could not help hitting the señor. Mono will bring me fortune with his tricks."

"Tricks!" Tobacco smoke left the guard's nose in a snort. "You taught him to steal. Mono enters windows and opens drawers."

"It was that I tried to teach Mono to go to windows for pesos," Dominic explained simply. "I had no pesos to practice with, so I used other things. True, he now gets things for himself from the señor's house, but I shall not have that trouble in Merida, where pesos grow like coffee berries."

"Mono will get you killed before you see Merida," the guard prophesied.

PRISONERS in big straw hats and sloppy whites formed a double line where the stocks had been. They set their feet flat on the ground to brace their wobbly knees. Great red bruises glared on brown wrists and ankles. They stared solemnly and listlessly at the

guard. He shifted the heavy .45 on his slim hip.

"Remember the señor's order," he shouted. "Say '*Buenas dias*' to the visiting señor and no more. For each word more—fifty lashes."

Two by two, the barefooted line shambled out of the hot compound. A jungle of great trees, vines as thick as a man's arm, and tangled underbrush made a matted screen along the edge of the cleared acreage. The sisal hemp grew in even, dark-green rows, dotted with white specks where men, women, and children swung their machetes.

Dominic Gomez shuffled at the rear of the column. His file mate limped badly from a cramp; he stumbled frequently when the guard hurried him. Dominic watched the matted screen of palms and bamboos until he saw an opening beside a mahogany tree. He thrust out his foot. His crippled file mate stumbled and fell in a heap. The guard bent over him.

Dominic slid behind the mahogany tree, scuttled under a banana plant, and squirmed through a net of vines. A shout went up. The guard crashed around in the underbrush. Dominic watched him from behind the vines. The guard squirmed under the banana plant.

Dominic's teeth made a sinister ivory line in his mahogany face. He formed a noose of a supple vine the thickness of a lead pencil. He waited for the guard to push his head through the net of vines. The noose was head-high, ready to be converted into a strangle knot.

The guard gave up the hunt abruptly. To admit he had lost a prisoner was to become a prisoner himself. He cried, "*Adelante!*" The double file shuffled away. A bird broke into song. The *chuck, chuck* of machetes on sisal was doubly

pleasant because Dominic felt he was hearing it for the last time.

The visitor who threatened ruin to Smee promised fortune to Dominic. Like so many Mexican Indians, Dominic was lost after he got fifty miles from home. Merida was four times that distance. He had not the least idea how to get there, but he had a childlike faith in the visitor. He would ask the new señor to take him to Merida, and it would be done!

Dominic went to his windowless thatched hut. He was welcomed joyfully by a Capuchin monkey, a foot high with an almost human face peering anxiously from a frill of white fur. Mono jingled his chain and chattered to be freed.

"No," Dominic said firmly. "If you run loose, you'll have me in trouble. They say you will get me killed before I see Merida. What do you think of that?"

The Indian bathed, then dressed in clean white shirt and pants and leather sandals. When he had wound a bright-red sash around his slender waist, stuck a machete through it, and put on his big hat, he was a fine fellow.

Dominic paused in the doorway. Smee was emerging from a thatched hut with barred window where prisoners were confined for solitary starvation. He carried a short-handled shovel. He had buried the ledger which he would say had been lost. Without that ledger, the auditor could suspect to his heart's content, but he could not prove the embezzlements. Smee left the shovel against a palm tree and returned to his own house.

Dominic waved a jaunty hand at Mono. "Be good, *mi probecito*. No, I cannot free you. A small stone can break a large jar. I would not have you get me in trouble to-day."

Mono chattered and whimpered. He threw himself against the collar only once. Then he got busy at the staple that fastened the chain to the hut wall.

THREE horsemen—an American and two natives—trotted out of the jungle trail. Dominic hurried to get to the house at the same time the visiting señor got there. It took nerve to escape the punishment gang and to walk boldly up to Smee's house, but Dominic knew of no other way to talk with the visitor, and he had to get to Merida. As Waller dismounted, the resplendent Dominic strolled around an hibiscus tree and halted in the piazza. He was unnoticed by Smee, who was shaking hands with his unwelcome guest.

The two Americans, meeting for the first time, took each other's measure. Smee rated the lion-headed, easy-mannered Waller as a man of strict justice and frank speech. Waller rated the hunched, shifty-eyed Smee as a schemer and thief.

Waller cast an experienced eye over the miles of sisal plants. He looked with understanding at the newly filled holes where stocks and lashing post had been. He turned to Dominic.

"How much do you earn?"

"Twenty-five centavos a day," Dominic answered automatically. He failed to notice Waller's accusing "So?" and Smee's start of guilt and anger. What did the twenty-five centavos matter to Dominic, who was about to make a fortune? His lips formed the word "Merida."

Had he shifted his eyes just then to his own hut, he would have seen Mono. With tail curled up jauntily and chain clinking, the monkey loped toward Smee's sala window.

When Smee saw who answered

Waller, his face became livid. Dominic had struck him, had escaped the punishment gang, and now boldly appeared on the piazza. Smee controlled his anger. "Come in and have a drink, Waller. Cool off."

"I'm cool enough," Waller said brusquely. "I'll look at your books, then ride over the plantation. You're delivering about two thirds of the sisal you should be getting off this place. And the boy here seems to think he gets twenty-five centavos, where it should be fifty."

"You don't think I'm holding out?" Smee said with a dangerously polite smile.

"I hope not."

Smee's eyes shifted from side to side. They lit on Dominic and pigeonholed him for the fall guy in case murder should be necessary.

"The books are in the sala. Come in, Waller."

Nothing in Smee's checkered career fitted his plans as well as the events of the next few minutes.

There came a shrill screech of a house girl and a babble of Indian invectives, the rattling of a chain, and then sounds of breakage. The chain clattered on the tile floor. Mono burst out the door. A long green paper streamed from his mouth.

"Oh, *mi pobrecito!*" Dominic whispered. "You've opened drawers again!"

"Give me that, you thieving devil!" Smee snarled. He snatched at the green paper.

A sidewise spring landed Mono in the crook of Waller's arm. Waller gentled him with a pat on the head and released the green paper.

"Railroad and steamer ticket," he commented. "Vacationing?"

"That monkey's a damn nuisance," Smee answered. "I can explain the ticket."

A PASSING field worker had stolen up for a look at the visitor. He idly swung a sisal machete. Smee seized the machete. He jerked the monkey backward out of Waller's crooked elbow. Holding the squirming monkey at arm's length, he swung the heavy blade.

Dominic's brown hand flew to the machete stuck in his red sash. The machete cut a gleaming arc and came to a stop with its sharp edge against Smee's neck. Smee froze with his arm up.

Muttering, "You're a savage dog," he dropped the monkey.

Dominic lowered his weapon. Smee instantly chopped at him. Dominic snapped his blade upright in a swift parry. Steel rang on steel. Smee tried to lock the knives. A push, a flirt of the wrist, a side-step, and Dominic was free. Smee struck at him. Dominic had been on the defense. Now he lunged into battle with the speed of an expert machete man.

Sunlight dripped off his flashing blade. There was a light *chuck*, and blood dripped where the sunlight had been. Smee gave a stifled cry as the weapon bit his arm. He slashed viciously at Dominic. Again the blades rang. Again Smee tried to hold, and Dominic freed himself.

Dominic drove in, playing the machete now to keep Smee constantly parrying, while he tried for an opening to knock the machete from Smee's hand. Smee backed. Dominic was almost toe to toe with him. The knives locked. It would take only a twist of the Indian's wrist to snap the machete out of Smee's grasp.

A fist hit the back of Dominic's neck. Everything went cloudy. Though Dominic kept his balance, he was unable to move hand or foot. Waller disarmed both men.

"You're pretty fast with that thing, my man," he said sharply to Dominic.

Dominic tried to say that he was only disarming Smee. Instead, he stammered: "Mono is my fortune maker. True, he opens drawers. But in Merida——"

"Dangerous fellow," Smee interrupted. "No intelligence. Like a savage dog. When the monkey is caught stealing, Dominic always outs with the machete." He signaled the guards.

Waller folded and pocketed the railroad ticket. "So you were ready to skip out. And a monkey tripped you up. There's a Mexican proverb about a small stone, but I can't remember it now."

Smee's eyes went red. He wanted to attack the big man outright with a machete, but that was foreign to his wily nature. The murder would come by gunshot, when Waller thought he was safest. It would come only when Smee was forced to it. So far, the railroad ticket and Dominic's statement about his pay were not real proofs of embezzlement. The ledger of proof was buried deep in the hut of the barred window.

Four men dragged Dominic away. Waller was still trying to recall his proverb when Smee opened the books on the table.

IN the hut of the barred window, Dominic sank down on the dirt floor. A chain rattled on the wall. Mono thrust his tiny white-ruffed face through the bars. He entered and tugged at Dominic's arm with loving chuckles and whines.

"Why did you do it, *pobrecito*? Didn't I tell you a small stone may break a large jar? You have broken me this day, Mono."

The discouragement was short-lived.

"Mono, listen to your papa," Dominic said eagerly. "We must follow the visiting señor to Merida. We cannot talk with him now. This floor is of the dirt. Señor Smee left a shovel against a palm. Bring me that shovel. Sabe, Mono?"

Mono was trained to bring something when Dominic said, "Bring." The trouble was to get him to bring what was wanted. Dominic dug with his hands in the corner where he found some loose earth. Mono was quick to imitate him. When the monkey was hot at the work, Dominic pushed him through the window bars, and said:

"Bring."

The shovel against the palm was the only movable thing in sight. The monkey walked sedately around the base of the palm. He raced up the palm, chattered, hurled dates at Dominic, and raced down. Then, wonder of wonders, he picked up the shovel, which was almost as big as himself, and carried it to the hut. Mono was small. The shovel was stubby.

Mono held it up. Dominic reached through the bars. He stretched his arm down until his fingers hurt with the effort. The cold edge of the shovel wavered against his fingers. He gripped it and pulled it slowly and carefully through the bars.

A place to dig was easy to find. Some other prisoner apparently had tried to get out. In one corner the earth was loose. Some one had re-filled a hole and trampled it down. Dominic dug industriously. By the time he stopped to take breath, he had opened a hole twelve inches in depth.

He went to the window. No one was near the hut. Some children

and dogs played in the peon row. Two old women on their knees ground corn in stone mortars. The grating of stone on stone covered the sound of his digging.

From the house came the señores' voices raised in argument—Smee's rapid with explanation, Waller's stern with justice. Gradually the voices changed. Smee became smoothly confident, while Waller was baffled. Smee was wily. He had fixed up the books. Waller could see things with his eyes that he could not prove with the books. An American would have known by their voices that something was up; Dominic was utterly unaware that any one but himself was trying to get out of a tight place.

He returned to his digging. At the first stroke, the shovel hit something solid. He tried to dig around it and could not. He tried to dig through it and could not. He thrust his hand in the hole and brought up a book. Dominic opened it. The pages of writing and figures were so many hen tracks to him. He touched a dirty finger to the black tracks in their red fences, and was surprised to discover that he could not feel them. He flipped a page and tried again. As his hand moved down the page a streak of sunlight fell across it. A man said:

"You can see for yourself there's no torture connected with this cell."

Smee and Waller were inside the hut. Each of them instantly grasped the meaning of shovel and hole. Smee went for the ledger, but Waller was quicker. He ripped it from Dominic's limp hands. Waller held the open book in the bend of his arm. He flicked the pages, reading aloud an item here, an entry there.

"The lost ledger," he said sternly. "Maybe we can straighten this thing out now. Steamer ticket, buried

ledger, acres of planting that don't jibe with your reports of the returns of sisal."

"I wasn't knocking out," Smee said quickly. "Things were bad. I tried to cover up. Give me a chance. I can get this plantation out of the hole."

"I'm afraid the plantation is like the ledger, Smee. You put it in the hole. I had hoped to get out of here this afternoon, but I'll have to stay to-night."

Smee's shifty eyes were flicked with red. "Nothing would please me more than to have you stay to-night. If," he added, "you're not afraid. Dominic is devilishly clever at escape. He's more expert with a gun than with the machete."

"I'll chance him."

They turned to go. Smee had the shovel, Waller the ledger. Mono scampered into the hut. Smee booted him out. The monkey fled wildly toward the jungle.

Waller was saying, "There's a proverb about a small stone——" when the door was locked on Dominic.

Dominic went back to the hole. When the loose earth was all out, he met unyielding earth. He dug until his fingers were bleeding and too sore to go on. Supperless, he lay on the dirt floor until the moon set. The peons' fires died and gossips' voices waned. The gossips had had a full evening, telling how Dominic escaped the punishment gang, only to be caught when Mono stole the green paper.

Women spoke of his macheting in admiration. Men laid bets on his probable punishment. The guard from the stocks flattened his face against the bars to repeat his assertion that Mono would get Dominic killed with his thefts and general cussedness.

AT midnight, Dominic sat up suddenly. He had heard a scuffling in the compound, a step so light a white man would not have heard it. It was Smee's quick, stealthy walk. Smee, carrying a lantern, crossed the compound and unlocked the hut door. Dominic stood with his back to the wall. Through the barred window, he had seen Smee's lead-tipped quirt by the light of the lantern.

Smee entered. He lugged in the flat-topped table he used as a desk. The table had a drawer, as Mono had once demonstrated to Dominic's sorrow. Earlier in the evening, the drawer had held a paper which would have surprised Dominic if he could have read it. It was a report to the head office. It told how Smee had shot Dominic after the Indian used a gun on Waller. This report was now in Smee's pocket. The drawer contained a heavy .45, two small iron braces, and a leather tool kit.

"A job for you, Dominic. I want the gun clamped to the under side of the table, and wires run from the trigger to the drawer. So that when the drawer is opened, the gun fires. Sabe?" He carefully went into detail, telling how to place the gun, how to screw in the braces, set the wires, and carve out firing port. "I should do it myself, but you're handier at these things than I am."

"It is with the sadness that I see my monkey get your paper this morning, señor. It was a lucky paper, no? But I could not have Mono killed. It is with him I intend to make my fortune, as you suggested, señor."

"Oh, forget the damn monkey and get to work. The ledger caused more trouble than the ticket did."

"Mono and I won't bother you much longer, señor."

"No," Smee agreed. "You won't."

He repeated all his instructions. It did not occur to Dominic to wonder how the gun would be used. He could think of only one thing at a time. Right then, he was thinking of getting to Merida with his fortune maker.

"How long will that job take, Dominic?"

"A short time. A very short time."

"That means all night. Be done before the dawn, or you'll take fifty lashes." He stole out and turned the key noiselessly in the lock.

Dominic fondled screw drivers and chisel while he listened to Smee crossing the compound. Then he went to the door. He chiseled away enough wood to get at the hinge screws. The screws he loosened sufficiently to work them out with his fingers. His escape prepared for, he got to work on the gun.

The setting of the gun took every minute of the allotted time. His torn, bloody fingers moved clumsily on the delicate job of fastening the trigger with wires. He had just got the drawer back in the table when he heard Smee coming.

Dominic opened the drawer and listened to the click of a firing hammer on an empty chamber. He clacked his tongue in admiration. It was a pleasant sound. The señor was indeed a smart man.

Smee opened the door noiselessly. Doors in the tropics frequently sag. He did not notice the loose swing of the hut door. He stood hunched over, swinging the lead-tipped quirt. He gave the Indian a sidewise glance from under lowered brows.

"Finished?"

"Finished, señor."

Dominic demonstrated. Smee grunted to hide his satisfaction. Murder by gunshot, when Waller

thought he was safest—he licked his lips. He carried the murder table out and locked the door.

Two minutes later, Dominic stole from the hut.

DAWN was waiting to pop over the horizon. Dominic went to his own hut in the peon row. He crammed himself full of tortillas and coffee. Extra tortillas went into his shirt. His guitar hung beside the door. He was ready to follow the visiting señor to Merida.

He lacked only his fortune maker, Mono.

With an eye out for Smee, he made the rounds of the huts where Mono was wont to come for tit-bits. No one had seen the monkey since Smee's kick sent him into the jungle. Dominic hunted in every conceivable hiding place. Mono was not in the stables, not in the sheds, not in the palms.

To the frequent question, "How did you get out?" Dominic answered, "The señor freed me." The Indians heard in unbelief. When the time came to go into the sisal fields, no one left. They lingered hopefully. Their morbid hopes were fulfilled when Smee went to the hut of the barred window.

He bolted back to the compound bell. The bell clanged out an urgent alarm, a long stroke and three short ones—"Prisoner escaped; kill if you must."

Smee's round shoulders twitched at every pull on the rope. Every Indian who saw his shifty eyes under lowered brows whispered that Dominic was as good as dead.

The bell halted Dominic in his search of the orange grove. It froze him in his tracks. He had heard that distinctive single long and triple short strokes five times

during Smee's management; he had seen Smee shoot down two of the escaped men on sight. Dominic turned longing eyes to the jungle, so near, so filled with hiding places.

"Of what good is it to go without Mono? Shall I spend another year training a monkey to go to windows for pesos?"

He resolutely took up the hunt and was soon rewarded by finding a half-eaten orange and a banana skin. Mono had passed by here. Another banana skin lay in the open compound. Dominic lingered among the heavily laden orange trees.

A party of machete men, led by a guard, trotted into the date palms across the compound. A similar group took the jungle trail. An Indian rang the compound bell at intervals to warn that a dangerous prisoner had escaped.

The heavily laden orange trees framed two sides of the compound. Smee's palm-thatched house was not twenty feet away from where Dominic stood. The house boy leaned out the window, shouting threats at the thatched roof.

"Mono has been in there." Dominic drew a breath to risk one call for the monkey. It was not necessary.

An orange hit him full in the chest. On the roof, Mono chattered at his joke and dared Dominic to try to hit him with an orange. Dominic beckoned with a crooked forefinger. Mono chuckled. Dominic plucked an orange and held it up enticingly. Mono scratched the white ruff around his anxious face. He ran back and forth, seeking a way down; he who could climb the log walls anywhere.

The compound bell tolled, "Prisoner escaped." The men who had searched the palms loped down the

sisal rows, their oiled shoulders and sharpened machetes glistening in the sun. On the roof, Mono ran out on the projecting beam ends and went over the edge, out of Dominic's sight.

The house boy had left the bedroom window. The *sala* window was open, but no one appeared in it. Dominic took a long chance that no one in the house would see him. He broke from the orange trees and scurried to the house wall, where he slid under a purple buginvillea vine beside the window. He stole one glance into the *sala*, before going onto the piazza. What he saw rooted him to the spot.

WALLER lounged in the far window. Smee was seating himself at the flat-topped table with the gun drawer. Smee's back was to Dominic. The door, at his right, was out of his line of vision. In the door stood Mono, watching Smee with the curiosity that humans always rouse in monkeys.

Dominic moved the orange up and down to catch Mono's quick eye without attracting Waller's attention. The monkey gave him a bored glance. Mono looked very small there in the door. When his miniature human face in its white ruff became intent and earnest, he looked smaller than ever.

Dominic whispered: "Bring, Mono. Bring."

"I've admitted it," Smee was saying. "What more do you want? I sold company sisal to independents, and took half the peons' wages. Sit down here." He pointed to the chair opposite him; that chair was directly in front of the muzzle of the hidden .45.

"I don't care to bargain, thanks," Waller answered.

Smee's fingers stole lightly over the knobs on the drawer. He hunched closer to the table and gazed sidewise from under lowered brows.

"You won't go to the company with that information, Waller."

"Why won't I?"

"You'll know." He waved toward the chair. "Sit down," he invited slyly.

Waller got up like a prize fighter leaving his corner. He grasped the chair top to pull it out far enough to sit down. Smee's hands fluttered over the drawer knobs. If Waller would sit down, the gun muzzle would be within three inches of his stomach, a deadly and quite certain shot.

Waller did not sit down at once. Hand on chair, he glared down at Smee.

The buginville vine shivered under Dominic's trembling. The visiting señor could see Mono plainly. If he turned his eyes from Smee, he might see Dominic, too.

Now Mono looked at Dominic, in answer to the whispered "Bring." The monkey looked around the room for something to bring. The table where Smee sat was the only table in the room, the only place where Mono could get anything. But Mono was not going to approach any place where Smee was.

For once, Smee did not shift his glance. His quick ear had heard a rustling in the window vines and an urgent whisper, "Bring, Mono." With Dominic at the window and Waller about to sit down, things were running as smoothly as an oiled gun. He coolly returned Waller's stare and pointed at the murder seat.

Waller ordered: "Get that ledger again. Don't try to look me down. Get the ledger."

"I'll bring it. Sit down." Smee hurried into the next room.

Waller remained standing, deep in thought. As soon as Smee came in, he would sit down and face the wily thief across the table. "You won't go to the company with that information." Wouldn't he?

SMEE appeared in the door, moving in his quick, stealthy way. Waller drew the chair out a little way. A white frill showed over the table edge. Mono's anxious face bobbed up and bobbed down. He was in Smee's chair, trying to open the drawer to get something to take to Dominic. It was a little harder to open than usual. Mono threw all his strength into a tug. The drawer opened so suddenly he was toppled off the chair.

The blast of a .45 echoed from wall to thatched roof. The lion-headed Waller got a foolish expression on his face. Just below his hand there was a hole in the chair's wicker back. A swirl of gray smoke drifted up from under the table edge. Before the bullet struck the far window ledge, Waller cried:

"So that's why I wouldn't be able to tell!"

His fist caught Smee flush in the jaw. Smee collapsed, just as the terrified Mono went through the window into Dominic's arms.

Dominic turned to run. The vines seemed to come to life. They clutched his feet and twined around his shoulders. He kicked and plunged. He fought through and stepped into the open. Twenty feet away were the orange trees, and beyond them, the jungle. But the jungle was not for Dominic.

Two powerful hands hauled him into the *sala* and dropped him, limp, on the tiled floor.

"The señor will forgive the mon-

key," Dominic begged. "He is of the so-little sense. But he is going to make me the fortune as the *Americanos* make it, with a hand organ; only I haven't the hand organ and must use a guitar."

"Who told you that bunk?" Waller asked.

"Señor Smee."

"Hm-m-m. In one of his sarcastic spells, and you didn't know it, of course. Americans make money growing things like sisal, Dominic. I don't blame you for using the machete on Smee. I know the marks of lashes and stocks. You stay here and all will be forgiven. You've got back pay coming."

"But I was to make a fortune in Merida!" he protested.

"What do you consider a fortune?"

Dominic figured rapidly and set a high figure. "Fifty pesos, señor."

"Fifty pesos. Twenty-five dollars. I guess my life is worth that much. Mono earned it when he opened the drawer."

As he counted out the silver, Waller asked, "Don't you Indians have a proverb about a small stone?"

"We say a small stone may break a large jar."

"That's it."

Dominic did not understand how the proverb applied. He did not know of Smee's plans for theft and murder. Even after the gun went off, he did not know Waller's death was intended. With solemn courtesy, he accepted the silver which Mono had "earned." He was too well-bred to betray his amazement. Wonders never end, where *Americanos* are concerned.

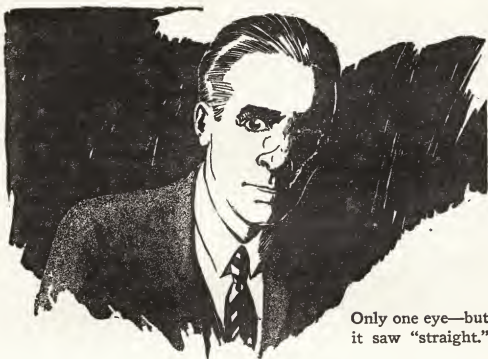
Who would have thought the visiting señor would pay fifty pesos just to see a monkey do a trick?



TRICKS IN THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

MANY ruses are devised by men to get others to do their work. Man has also perfected many systems by which he can make animals perform his labor, the most notable example being the Chinese fisherman's method of training the cormorant to fish. However, long before the cormorant had been trained to perform the fisherman's labor, the bald eagle was forcing the fishing hawk into similar service.

Some birds, also, are clever strategists, chief of these being the cassowary. The cassowary, a large bird and a near relative of the ostrich, is supposedly a dry-land bird, but it is known to go occasionally to the water questing for food. It wades into a shallow stream, squats down, then spreads and submerges its heavily plumed wings. After remaining quite still for several minutes, it steps to the bank, shakes itself, and hastily devours the small fish which it has caught in the effective net formed by its feathers.



Only one eye—but
it saw "straight."

CYCLOPS

By G. H. Coxé

HIS real name was José Tavares. He drifted into the lumber camp at Black Lake late one November afternoon and we first saw him when he entered the dining room that night. He stood there in the doorway, uncertain and awkward, trying to find a place that was vacant.

Our outfit was made up, for the most part, of backwoodsmen of one sort or another: Americans, Swedes, French-Canadians, a Russian or two. We were used to having strangers drift in, almost every type from the college boy who comes during vacation to the city bum who stays two or three weeks and then moves on.

But this man was different. He

was dressed in a tight-fitting blue suit, pinched in at the waist, and he wore patent-leather shoes. Although he did not appear to be much more than thirty, his black hair was streaked with gray and plastered back on his head. He was slender and sick-looking, his face a grotesque mask.

One dark eye, blinking at us out of a dead-white face, made me think of a marble in a cake of soap. The other eye socket formed a terminal for a wide, livid scar which ran down to the corner of his mouth, making it a leering slit. The nose was twisted. The entire face seemed to be a pitiful, repulsive example of plastic surgery at its worst.

He must have stood there a full

minute; yet no one in the room so much as lifted a fork. Even when he finally stepped around the nearest table and dropped into a vacant place the silence continued. If anything the tension increased. Some one should have told the fellow he had "Buck" Walters's place. But no one did.

Walters swung into the room, a chesty, confident figure in corduroy and flannel. He was a big man, an inch or two over six feet and weighing close to two hundred. He turned toward his seat, then stopped short as he saw the stranger. The grin on his red, weathered face turned to a scowl.

Walters's action was uncalled for but, to us, it seemed ordinary enough. He was the straw boss of the mill yard, a natural leader and something of a bully. Not vicious, but a bully, nevertheless. He would have done the same thing to any one that he did to Tavares. I don't think he did it to be nasty, probably he never gave a thought to his conduct.

He walked up behind the fellow, who was buttering a slice of bread, winked at us, then reached down and fastened a big, thick-fingered hand in the man's collar. He lifted him right out of the seat and stood him on the floor.

"You're in the wrong pew, buddy," he grunted.

Tavares's face went gray and his one eye narrowed. "Why didn't you say so?" he asked. "I'd 've let you have it."

"I'm sayin' so now." Walters glowered at the sudden comeback. He took Tavares's slender arm and pushed him aside. The man resisted and Walters put both hands on the fellow's shoulders and steered him out of the way—or started to. Then he seemed to freeze to the spot.

Tavares's voice ripped through

the room. "Back up, jack! Back up!"

Then we saw why Walters stiffened. I don't know where it came from, or how he got it out, but there was an automatic in Tavares's hand, and he held it right up against Walters's stomach.

I guess there were forty of us in the room at the time, and not one of us made a move or uttered a sound. Walters started backing. Nothing had been said about his hands, but he lifted them, nevertheless. Tavares followed him to the wall, then said, "Apologize, jack, or start praying."

He didn't raise his voice, didn't try to accent it. Yet the menace was there. Walters looked stunned, his lips moved, but made no sound.

Sam Carmody came out of the kitchen. He was boss of the unskilled labor and his wife ran the mess for us. He was a squat, barrel-chested fellow, but he moved toward Tavares with catlike quickness. He made no attempt to grab the gun. He just said:

"We don't go in for that kind of stuff here, fella."

Tavares hesitated, then stepped back. Carmody's lip curled as he continued. "If I was you, Cyclops, I'd clear out of here right now, while you got your health. But if you stay, put that gun in your room and keep it there. If you don't, they'll take you out of here in pieces."

OUR rooms were in an old, ramshackle summerhouse and there was an extra bed in my room. When I went upstairs that night I found "Cyclops" in that bed.

"So, I've drawn you, eh, Cyclops?" I said. I used his nickname naturally enough and thought no more about it until after I was in bed.

Carmody's apt seizure of that name had appealed to the men. I

doubt if more than ten of them knew its significance. But that made no difference. It was a new name to them, it was easy to say, and they used it.

The men did a lot of mean things to Cyclops in the next few months, but I doubt if anything was meaner than the constant use of that nickname. Because he, too, knew where it came from. I was a checker and makeshift timekeeper for the outfit and I saw a lot of Cyclops that winter. I don't think he ever got used to that name; it seemed to me that he flinched every time any one called him.

To have a repulsive face like that was bad enough; to be constantly reminded of the fact would be a bitter pill, even for a hardshell like Walters. I had no sympathy for Tavares then, as a man. But before I dropped off to sleep I decided I would not call him Cyclops any more—to his face.

About midnight I awakened with a start. The room was pitch dark. And in that blackness Cyclops was pacing the floor in his bare feet, muttering to himself, cursing under his breath. I listened to the *slap-slap* of those bare feet until I was thoroughly awake. Then I began to get mad.

"What in hell's the idea?" I snapped.

"I can't sleep."

"Well, I can, if you'll let me. G'wan back to bed!"

There was a sound of movement on the other bed. The springs creaked. Silence settled over the room again, and I turned over and closed my eyes. Then his bed creaked again. I knew Cyclops's lips were moving, could hear them smacking together, as though he was sucking a piece of hard candy.

I finally got up and lighted the

lamp. Then I sat on the edge of the bed and scowled at him.

"What the hell's the matter with you, anyway?"

"Guess?" he rapped.

And I did guess, for a long time. The almost insane glow in his eye, the twitching of his leering mouth, the pallor of his face finally gave me the answer.

"Dope," I said. I'd never seen a man like that before, not in that condition. But I'd read enough to understand something about what he was going through.

He got out of bed and began pacing the floor again and he was like a scarecrow in underwear. "I haven't got a dime," he moaned. "I'm eating on credit until I get a job at the mill. I can't buy the stuff—and I can't get out."

He quieted down a bit then. I went to sleep. When you work from six to five in a lumber outfit you have to have sleep.

NATURALLY, Buck Walters did his best to make life miserable for Cyclops. I guess nobody'd ever pulled a gun on him before. There were plenty of .30-30s in camp, but not many side guns; we had no use for them. And Walters's humiliation had taken place in front of all of us. Carmody gave Cyclops a job—twenty-six cents an hour we started at in those days—and Walters gave him hell.

That first day in the yards nearly killed him. He passed out cold about two o'clock on one of the lumber piles. Walters came by while two of the fellows were trying to bring Cyclops around. Walters told them to get back to work. He walked to the mill, got a fire bucket and doused the whole pailful of water on Cyclops.

At three o'clock Walters had to

repeat the performance and this time Cyclops couldn't stand up. Walters pulled him off the pile and dropped him down to the ground.

"We'll dock you for these two hours," he said.

After a half hour Cyclops got to his feet and staggered back to the house. He was sleeping when I got there, and he didn't awaken until the next morning. I guess that rough treatment and the sleep saved him.

Utter physical exhaustion the next couple days did more than anything else could have to break his habit. He was like a ghost, he jumped at the slightest noise and his face twitched constantly. But he slept nights and began to eat something.

Walters must have sensed Cyclops was a dope addict because on the second night he was holding forth among the pinochle players down in the front room we used for reading and cards.

"That wop is a doper," he said. "You can tell by looking at him."

Somebody said, "Then what did he come up here for?"

"He came up here," growled Walters, "because somebody chased him here. I'll bet a week's wages he's one of them gangsters. Where did he get that map of his? Somebody slashed him. And what did he carry a gun for? How'd he learn to handle it like that?"

"He probably double-crossed his pals. He's hiding out because this is the last place anybody'd look for a guy like him. Without his gun he's a rat; without his dope he'll have a yellow streak the whole width of his back. Wait 'n' see."

And Walters proceeded to prove his point in subsequent days. He tormented Cyclops whenever he could. He never used physical violence, but he taunted him and gave him the hardest, dirtiest jobs. He

ridiculed him in front of the men, asked him if he left his nerve with his gun.

It gets pretty cold in the Adirondacks in November and the fellow was a pitiful sight, shivering around in his city clothes. He finally traded a hundred dollars' worth of wrist watch for ten dollars' worth of old clothes, but even these failed to rub out the impression that he was a dope addict and a coward without his gun.

If it hadn't been for Mrs. Carmody I doubt if he could have stuck it. For a while, under Walters's sponsorship, the fellows at his table saw to it that Cyclops's food was mostly left-overs. But when Emma found out about it, she changed that.

I don't know whether it was because, like all good cooks, she wanted to see every one eat and enjoy her dishes, whether it was a natural sympathy for the under dog, or whether it was just pity. Anyway, she started to bring in his plate from the kitchen and it was loaded down with the best of everything. All that didn't make it any easier for Cyclops with the men, especially Walters; but it helped him carry on.

The Carmodys had a daughter, Jean. About twelve she was and one of those pretty kids who are full of life and laughter. She had the run of the whole camp, including the office, and Cyclops, to show his appreciation for what Emma did for him, began to buy little things for Jean.

There was some candy or a toy for her every pay day. To me it would have been a hopeless procedure because the girl was plainly afraid of him, frightened by that face. But Cyclops, if he was aware of this, persisted, as though it was the one way to show his gratitude. He'd give his presents to Emma and tell her they were for Jean.

We had a heavy snowfall a couple weeks after Cyclops arrived and he was still working in his patent-leather shoes. They never got a chance to dry out and he developed a mean cough.

"Why don't you buy some decent boots?" I asked him one night.

"Haven't got the price."

That didn't sound right. He was making about fifteen a week. He had to pay seven dollars for his board, and a dollar for his room. That left him seven dollars and I told him so.

"I have to send five dollars a week away," he said.

"What the hell for?" I asked. But he didn't answer.

He had two dollars, and I lent him three to get boots. It wasn't because I liked him. I'll admit it. But I knew he'd never last the winter without them and I knew I'd get my money back.

IF it hadn't been for Walters I think the men would have let Cyclops alone. But in a camp like ours, it's a case of follow the leader and Walters egged them on. He enlisted the aid of "Stumpy" Bates, who was a little squirt, and dumb. But he suffered from a case of hero worship.

You can't smoke on the job in most lumber mills and so the fellows chewed—tobacco or snuff, with the ranks about evenly divided. Cyclops, in spite of the razzing, kept to his city habit of gum chewing.

One day he was in by the sorting table—an endless moving platform where the boards are taken off and placed on the proper trucks for stacking out in the yard—and Stumpy walked up to him.

"Ever try any snuff?" he asked.

"No," said Cyclops, "I never have."

"How about trying some?"

"No, thanks. I don't believe I want any."

"Well, I think you do." Stumpy grabbed Cyclops around the waist. Two other fellows got wise because they'd tried the same thing on some college fellows who were in camp that summer. They picked up Cyclops and laid him on one of the trucks.

They held him while Stumpy crammed snuff in both upper and lower lips. Cyclops struggled for a moment, then just lay there. They held him for three or four minutes until he could get the feel of the snuff, then let him up. Cyclops spat out as much of the stuff as he could and went quietly back to work.

Right after that he tried to get a job in the woods in one of the logging camps. But that work called for skilled woodsmen and, of course, he had no chance. But somehow it got out that he wanted to get away. That gave the men another chance to razz him.

One Sunday Walters and I went out with our shotguns for some rabbits. We didn't see one until we were nearly back to camp. Then a big fellow jumped out of a snow-covered brush pile about fifty feet in front of us. Neither of us was ready, but Walters got his gun up and cut loose.

It was a tough shot and he missed. He cursed and stood staring after the disappearing rabbit. Then we heard another shot. It wasn't the crashing roar of a shotgun; it was more like the staccato bark of a rifle. Walters looked at me and his red face twisted into a puzzled scowl.

"What the hell was that?" he grunted, and started off in the direction of the shot.

We found Cyclops holding the rabbit by his ears and looking him over. In his hands his automatic

hung loosely. He looked up, saw us and waited for us to come up to him.

"Pretty handy with that pistol, eh?" leered Walters.

"Not so very," said Cyclops. He turned his head so he could give Walters full benefit of that one eye and his mouth curled in what might have been either a smile or a sneer. "He was pretty close."

I didn't say anything, but I knew it took skill to make a shot like that with a side gun. But Walters was sore. "That's my rabbit," he growled. "I shot it first. If he had not been wounded you'd never been able to hit it."

Cyclops looked at Walters for a moment and didn't say anything. He held the rabbit up, looked him over. "There's only one mark on him," he said slowly, "and that's mine."

I noticed his voice sounded different—something like it had that first night. Walters must have noticed it, too. He looked at Cyclops, then down at the automatic. The gun was loosely held, but the muzzle had shifted slightly—toward Walters.

I'm not sure, but I think Buck's face stiffened. He made some noises in his throat, turned and stalked off.

Before I had a chance to follow him Cyclops spoke to me. And again his voice had changed. "This is for Mrs. Carmody—and the little girl," he said.

Walters elaborated on the tale that evening so that it sounded as though Cyclops had pulled a gun on him. The men were sore, which may have accounted for what happened the following day.

THE mill yards at Black Lake are like a miniature railroad terminal except that the tracks are built up in the air, on what are called docks. Two narrow-gauge tracks lead from the sorting shed

and then branch off on about forty sidings so that the lumber piles spread over a wide area.

The height of the docks vary from about eight to fifteen feet, depending on the contour of the ground, and to the careless worker they are a constant menace. A dozen or more men fall off every year. Those who are lucky enough to land on their feet often get off with a shaking; sometimes they break a leg. Those who do not land on their feet are generally hospital cases.

Stumpy Bates and Cyclops were pushing a loaded truck that afternoon and Cyclops was walking beside it. That was his own fault because the docks are narrow and the only safe place to walk is behind, or in front. From hints that were dropped later on, it appeared that Stumpy slid a ten-foot plank off sidewise. It caught Cyclops on the hip.

Fortunately, he knew from the moment it struck him he was going. So he jumped. He struck on his feet, then went over on his face. He was lying there in the snow, his hands tucked in his groin, his knees drawn up when Walters and I arrived.

"Come on!" snapped Walters. "Get up! You ain't hurt."

I climbed down beside Cyclops. He was on his feet then and I asked him if he was all right. He said, "Yes," but pain kept him hunched over and he hobbled off.

"Dock him for the afternoon," said Walters, and went back to work.

IN the spring the pressure on Cyclops eased up. By that time no one paid any attention to him. Because he kept to himself, because he made no attempt to stand up for his rights except when he had a gun, he was branded yellow and ignored.

I don't think he had a friend in camp. I was still his roommate, but he never spoke to me unless spoken to, and after a bit I didn't try to press him.

He did gain a little ground with Emma and Jean Carmody, however. Emma would always give him a smile and Jean got so she would speak to him and accept his little gifts personally. I know that pleased him, because once or twice I caught him humming to himself.

Then, along in May, I saw the other side of Cyclops. I found him sitting on his bed one evening with a picture in his hand. And I'm sure there was a sparkle in that eye of his that time. He showed me the picture. It was of a slim, dark-haired, attractive girl of about nineteen or twenty. And when he spoke he was like a different person.

"That's my sister," he said. Then, "I'll be leaving next month." I did not say anything and he continued, "She's been studying to be a teacher and she graduates next month. She's already got a job lined up and we're going to be together. I haven't seen her in three years."

Of course I knew then why he had come to Black Lake. "So that's where you were sending the five bucks each week?" He nodded and I said, "The fellows around here think you're a gangster." The remark sounded irrelevant as I heard it, but it wasn't, not with what was in my mind. I was thinking of his sister.

"You might call it that," he said simply.

"And she doesn't know it?"

"No."

"And that's why you wanted to break the dope habit, that's why you came to a place like this without any money?"

He nodded again and went on talk-

ing about his sister. How their parents were dead and how he had been helping her through school. Finally I asked him why he'd been a gangster and how he got the dope habit. But at that he shut up. I wanted to ask him if his sister knew about his face, but I didn't.

We had one train a day at Black Lake—if you could call the engine and one car which came through from Tupper Lake Junction a train—and it was just wheezing up to the shed that served as a station the following Friday when Cyclops came into the company's office.

Buck Walters and I were going over the time cards, getting them ready for the clerk who made out the pay roll. Fred Stevens, the superintendent, was talking with the bookkeeper, and Jean Carmody was sitting at one of the three desks, playing with a typewriter.

I didn't pay any attention to Cyclops because Walters and I were pretty busy and in another minute the paymaster came in. He was lugging the big canvas pouch in which he carried the money, and his .45 slapped against his hip as he walked. He called a greeting to us, moved up to the safe, and dropped the bag beside it.

In the next instant I heard the office door open. Then somebody rapped, "All right, you guys, up with 'em!"

Three men stood in the doorway. Two of them were young and slender; the other was older, a thickset fellow with bushy brows. All three of them had guns. I turned around and started to lift my hands. The paymaster went for his gun. The thickset man fired. The paymaster coughed once and fell forward on his face. His gun skidded across the floor to one side of the room.

I looked at the rest of the men

in the room. The clerk, the bookkeeper, Stevens, Walters, and myself were all standing down at one end of the office with our hands up. Jean Carmody, seemingly glued to the spot, still sat at the desk, her eyes wide with fear. Cyclops had his hands raised and stood nearest the door.

THE office wasn't very large. There was no chance to get out and not much shelter. I guess we all knew, after what happened to the paymaster, what we could expect if we started anything. And not one of us was armed.

"All right, you punks, line up!" The thickset man and one of the youths moved toward us. "Up there along this wall." He motioned us to one side so that we were strung out with Cyclops on one end and me on the other. The thickset man was still giving orders.

"Get that telephone, Lefty!" The youth who had remained by the door stepped forward. He found the lead wire of the telephone box and ripped it out. Then he stood in the center of the room covering us while the other two went over to the safe. The thickset man looked down at the paymaster, the other fellow picked up the pay-roll pouch.

Then I saw the paymaster's gun on the floor. It was about opposite Walters and not more than four feet in front of him. It was partly hidden from the gunmen by a desk, and for a second or two I considered the possibility of trying to get it. But common sense told me the idea was crazy. Walters might have had a chance at it, but for any of the rest of us it would have been suicide.

"We got a car outside," the gunman snarled in short, clipped sentences. "But we ain't kiddin' ourselves about the get-away. We got

this phone, maybe there's others in camp. We ain't got time to find out. Only two roads lead from this dump and maybe you think you'll head us off. Well, think again."

He stepped over to Jean Carmody and took her by the arm. "Whose kid is this?"

"My foreman's," said Stevens.

"O. K. We'll take her along. We want about four hours' start. Keep this quiet until nine to-night and we'll let the kid out where she can get help. Try to stop us and——"

"You can't get away with that." It was the first word Cyclops had spoken and his voice reminded me of the first night I saw him.

"That's what you think!" snarled the man. He stabbed his gun toward the paymaster. "He's dead, ain't he? And we bumped him, didn't we? It's the chair if we're caught. But they can only burn you once, punk. Think it over. If you want to see this kid alive, keep your mouths shut, all of you."

The fellow jerked Jean to her feet and she screamed. "Shut up!" he snarled and shook her; she screamed again. Then he slapped her. The next thing I knew he grabbed her to him and I heard some one say, "Drop it!"

THERE has never been any doubt in my mind about Cyclops. He knew these men were desperate, knew they were killers. He was an experienced gunman himself and he must have known what to expect. Certainly he knew he had no chance of making it before they started shooting.

He had reached the paymaster's gun and was bending over it by the time I looked at him. When he straightened up they let him have it. There were three shots, two from one gun and one from another.

Three times I saw Cyclops's lean body jerk as the slugs tore into him.

He fired twice, so close together the shots almost sounded as one. One youth dropped the pay-roll pouch, staggered and sat down suddenly. He was conscious, but he uttered no sound. He just sat there with a dumb expression in his eyes. The other fellow dropped his gun, grabbed at his stomach. He bent over, sort of curled up as he fell. Then Cyclops and the thickset man faced each other.

I guess it was sheer will power that kept Cyclops on his feet. He looked like a whisky-paralyzed drunk. His knees had begun to sag and one hand reached to the desk top for support. The thickset man crouched behind Jean Carmody so that only his head and his gun were visible.

"Drop that gun!" he screamed. "Drop it or—"

Cyclops's voice sounded tired, but there was bitterness in every syllable. "Your number's up, jack," he said. "Get out from behind the girl and take it like a man."

The gunman waited—waited, I guess, for Cyclops to fold up under the three slugs he carried. Then he must have seen Cyclops's trigger finger tense, must have seen the decision in his one good eye even as I sensed that he was going to shoot.

I thought Jean was done for. Cyclops was weaving back and forth on his feet; he didn't seem to be aiming the gun. I started to yell something—I don't know what because the words stuck in my throat.

They squeezed triggers together. The guns roared in unison. Cyclops staggered, slumped down on the desk, one hand dangling over the side. A tiny black spot appeared in the middle of the thickset man's forehead; a black spot that was a

hole which widened as his eyes glazed. He rocked forward on his toes. Then he and Jean and the gun flopped to the floor in a bloody heap.

The clerk and the bookkeeper eased Cyclops from the desk to a chair. The desk top was bloody and the front of his patched flannel shirt was wet and red. I caught a glimpse of Walters making for the door. Stevens was kneeling beside Jean Carmody. Cyclops took hold of my hand.

"My sister," he whispered hoarsely. "Take care of my things—my insurance. I'm countin' on you." His eye was bright, and I'm sure the twitch of his lips before he died was a smile.

I WROTE Cyclops's sister that night. And from the assortment of belongings in his one suitcase I got the rest of his story. It was quite simple.

The Croix De Guerre and the Distinguished Service Cross, together with three citations explained his lacerated face. He had been a machine gunner. From bits of a sketchy diary I learned of his almost constant hospitalization for five years and the forming of the dope habit.

From letters I found the story of a sensitive man who, because of his deformity, had avoided his friends and eventually landed among the one class who ask no questions—the underworld. His activities there had paid for his sister's education.

I burned the diary and those letters that I knew he would not want her to know about.

When I went downstairs I learned that Walters had not shown up for supper. He left camp the next morning without speaking to any of us.



MEN OF HONOR

By Bob DuSoe

A "pin" through a "butterfly."

PAUL BERNARD, a shapeless straw hat pulled down over his eyes to protect them from the glaring sun, sat motionless in a corner of the courtyard awaiting his summons. A guard stood near by in the shade of a sentry box, and the lazy buzz of flies mingled with the monotonous drone of voices that came from the open windows at one end of the courtroom.

The prison tribunal was in session that day. Jean Molin, the turnkey, had been murdered, and old "Papillon"—the butterfly—was on trial

for his life. Bernard was there to testify because he could truthfully swear that he had seen Papillon a good half mile away on the other side of St. Laurent at the time the murder was supposed to have been committed. His testimony would probably result in his own confinement, because he had had no right to be where he was that day.

But what of that? He knew too well how easy it is for an innocent man to be caught in a web of circumstances. Life is cheap in Guiana, but if he could save old Papillon from the guillotine, what did it mat-

ter that he himself would suffer a month or two in the cells?

A guard appeared in the doorway and mopped the sweat from his long, swarthy face. "Come on, you," he ordered, and jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "They're ready for you."

Bernard stood up and walked to the door. His step was slow and his cheeks were colorless, but his eyes were still clear and there was youth in his carriage. Guiana and the prison had not yet robbed him completely. He removed the tattered straw hat and followed the guard on into the room.

The superintendent fidgeted with boredom while the clerk made the necessary notes in his records. The pen scratched, and Bernard's indifferent glance shifted from one to the other of the prison officials in their spotless white to rest finally on the frail, stooped figure of Papillon.

Twelve years the old man had served at hard labor and eight in exile. Four years more and his debt to society would be paid in full. Whatever his crime had been, he had paid for it dearly. That there had been a crime, Bernard did not doubt. In spite of his bald head and his long, gray beard there was a crafty glint in Papillon's beady, black eyes that belied the reverence implied by his age. Sufficiently angered and reasonably sure of escape, he would probably not have hesitated to slip a knife between the ribs of any man there, and with no more remorse than he would have felt in sticking a pin through one of his butterflies.

"You have volunteered the information," the superintendent addressed Bernard, "that on the afternoon of February the eighteenth, between the hours of two and three

thirty you saw and spoke with the prisoner in the vicinity of Wing Tai's store. Is that correct?"

"It is."

"You will tell us how you knew it to be the exact hour you mention, and what you yourself were doing in the vicinity of Wing Tai's store at this time."

"I knew it was two o'clock, or a very few minutes after," Bernard replied, "because the two-o'clock drum had just sounded and we were on the way to the mill when one of the guards asked me to hurry over to the Chinaman's store for a package of tobacco. Papillon was seated on the ground near the store examining his butterflies when I arrived, and I stopped to talk with him."

Bernard did not say that he had also carried a note to the half-caste daughter of the Chinaman for which he had been instructed to wait for a reply. That was a matter which had nothing to do with the case at hand.

THE superintendent frowned. "Am I to understand that you remained there then for an hour and a half conversing with the prisoner?"

Bernard shook his head. "No, I was not talking all that time. I looked at the butterflies; asked him where he caught them, how much he got for them, and a few things like that, then went into the store. When I came out Papillon was still there, but this time I stopped to talk with a group of *libérés* who were discussing the arrival of the next boat. When I left them I went straight to the mill."

"And you estimate that an hour and a half had passed between the time you left the prison and finally arrived at the mill?"

"I had no idea I had been that

long, monsieur, but the guard declared that it had taken me an hour and a half and that next time he would send some one else."

"He will for the next two months, at least," the director stated with significance. "Which of the guards was it?"

"Guy Cordeau," Bernard replied. He would rather not have told, but the superintendent would have found out easily enough had he refused.

"I see, and you are positive that you went straight to the store from the prison?"

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

"You are also sure it was the prisoner—this man here—with whom you talked?"

"Positive, monsieur."

"That will do, and since time passes so quickly for you, you will go to the cells for sixty days and do your loitering there."

Bernard shrugged his muscular shoulders. He had expected that. He wondered if what he had said would also make trouble for the guard. He hoped not. Cordeau was a decent sort. Not like Jean Molin, whose death seemed to have pleased more than it grieved.

Bernard glanced at the prisoner. There was a faint grin on the wrinkled face of Papillon, and as their eyes met the old man nodded ever so slightly. Bernard understood. The old convict was trying to thank him. Not that he expected to be thanked. He had done no more than he would have expected any one else to do for him, only in his case the man who might have helped had failed him instead.

The guard seized Bernard by the arm and shoved him toward the door. It was a particularly vicious shove and he turned to stare at the man. It was Durand, better known

as "Pelican," because of his enormous nose and long, thin face, and Bernard knew at once that he had made an enemy whether his testimony freed Papillon or not. Durand had been one of the very few friends of the murdered Molin, and it was he who had accused Papillon because of threats the old man had made in the past.

BERNARD served his sixty days in the cells and went back to the dormitory in the main prison to resume his days at labor. There remained three hundred and twenty of them yet to serve, and then he would begin his four years in exile.

He had not been one of the many who were forever attempting to escape. He had thought that all out, comparing the failures and the inevitable punishment with the few attempts that had been successful, and had decided that in his case it was better to spend his time and efforts in preserving his health and sanity. Eight years was not long compared to ten, twenty, and even thirty that confronted some. Had that been his lot he would have long since staked everything on one desperate attempt.

However, this had been his reasoning before he had incurred the enmity of Durand. Persecution at the hands of Pelican began the day he returned to the prison, and in a week the confidence he had stubbornly maintained so long began to waver. It was the dry season; the humid, tropic heat was stifling, and each day's labor under the relentless driving of Durand brought him nearer a state of collapse.

With proper food and sleep a man young and strong like Bernard could have withstood the devouring toil for many months, but the

watery soup, the bread and the niggardly portions of meat doled out in the prison at St. Laurent is barely enough to prevent starvation. There are a few tasks less strenuous that go to the favored, but it was Bernard's misfortune to have been assigned to the lumber yard on his release from the cells, and there from morning until midday and from midday until dark he struggled and strained under the weight of heavy timbers and boards until his knees shook with fatigue.

To plead or protest would gain him nothing. To rebel might bring anything from solitary confinement to death. It was impossible to stall, to steal a few minutes rest now and then, for the mean, detesting glance of Durand was forever upon him.

At night with his stomach empty and complaining, too exhausted to sleep, Bernard lay on his bed of planks thinking, pondering and afraid. Not of the malice of Durand, but of what he himself might do when he could stand it no longer, and it was then that his thoughts turned to escape. He had less than a year to serve. Had conditions remained as they were, the time would have passed quickly, but now he knew he could not hope to survive. Durand would see to that. His one hope was to escape, and if he waited long he would be too far gone for even that.

Bernard had often criticized the others for their foolhardy breaks, their unpreparedness, but now that he had decided to make the attempt himself, he found that he was even less prepared than most of the others had been. He had no plan whatever; he had no money for food, and he had no weapon. Yet he knew that at the first opportunity he must lose himself in the treacherous jungle.

THE opportunity came a few days later and Bernard made the break without hesitation. The convicts from the lumber yard were sent to help with the beaching of logs at the river, and while Durand talked with one of the other guards, Bernard slipped away through the tangle of brush and vines along the bank.

Ducking and dodging along the narrow path, he ran steadily until lack of breath forced him to stop. If Durand did not notice his absence at once he would be sure to miss him at the ten-o'clock drum. For a few francs he could have hired some bush Negro to paddle him across the Maroni, but he lacked the money to buy even that small advantage. When he had regained his breath he hurried on, keeping to the path by the river, mindful only of the distance he put behind him.

Toward the late afternoon his thoughts turned to food and his feverish haste gave way to a more normal stride. He must find a place to sleep, too. If he were to stretch out there on the ground a thousand insects would devour him alive. There were berries and nuts in great plenty if he only knew which of them were edible. He did not want to run the risk of poisoning himself so soon. Later on it might not make so much difference.

Bernard had hoped to find a native camp or at least a rubber bleeder from whom he could beg sufficient food to carry on, but all that day he saw not a single human being. When the shadows began to lengthen he drank deep from the river and climbed to the wide-spread branches of a tree. He made a sling between two limbs with the aid of vines and branches, and there he spent the night. Monkeys came to chatter and protest, and later the

night birds made the jungle hideous with their cries, but Bernard slept through it all, numb with exhaustion.

When morning came he went back to the river to drink again and bathe, then continued on his way. His ears, alert to every sound, caught the distant drone of voices toward midday, and peering out on the river he saw a dugout laden with a family of Indians drifting down the current. He called to them; pointed frantically to his mouth then his stomach, but the Indians only stared with indifference while the river carried them on their way. A fugitive convict meant nothing to the Indians and Bernard, in his ragged prison garb with a number stenciled across the front of his blouse, was conspicuously labeled.

Angry and disappointed, with doubt gnawing now at his fevered brain, he stumbled on along the path. He saw no other signs of habitation either on the river or in the jungle, and that night he climbed again to the protecting limbs of a tree. It was his second day without food and the next would be his last if he continued to starve himself. His only alternative was to fill his stomach with the wild things that grew alongside the trail and trust to Heaven that they would not throw him into immediate convulsions.

Morning came and once more he drank his fill at the river. Water, however, no longer appeased the demands of his empty stomach. He was weak. He must eat or he could not go on. A bush laden with inviting black and red berries grew near by and he picked one of each to taste them.

"Eat only the black ones," a voice spoke at his elbow. "The red are not ripe and their juice is bitter."

Bernard straightened with a gasp. "Papillon!"

The old man chuckled. "To be sure. And what is so amazing about that?"

"I guess it was the start you gave me," Bernard replied. "I was about convinced that there was not a living soul in this whole cursed jungle. And you—well, the last I saw of you your head was bowed to the crimson widow."

"You had not heard that they turned me loose?"

"No. You remember I went from the courtroom straight to the cells."

"Yes, yes, I remember. I owe you much, *mon ami*. You fell in with my scheme exactly as I had planned."

"Your scheme! What do you mean?"

"Even you did not guess, eh?" Papillon grinned with delight. "I must tell you, but not now. You are in need of food. We will go to my camp where it is safe; where you can rest, and we will talk there."

DEEP in the jungle, Papillon approached the bank of a small stream, and parting a clump of undergrowth he bowed Bernard into a small, well-kept clearing. High and above them, slung between two giant trees, was a platform where the old man netted certain species of those gorgeous butterflies that he sold to the broker in St. Laurent.

"It is not much of a camp," Papillon apologized, "but at least it is better than the cells. And here is food. Eat, but do not make yourself ill."

With a dried fish in one hand and a cake of cassava in the other, Bernard sat with his back to a tree and ate.

Papillon shook his head. "And

you left St. Laurent without a bit of food—without even a knife. *Sacré*, it is a good thing that I followed your trail. What brought you to Guiana in the first place? You do not look like a Frenchman. You do not talk like one."

"And I am not one," Bernard declared. "I am an American, so unfortunate as to have been born in Paris. And I am here in Guiana because it was my further misfortune to have been a guest of the nephew of the Count de Montvere the night the old reprobate was murdered and robbed."

"You should have had an alibi, *mon ami*. Always be sure of an alibi."

"The nephew should have been my alibi, *mon ancien*, but he himself was guilty and he was too low-principled to tell the truth."

"You do not seem as bitter against him as some would have been. Tell me, why did you attempt an escape so unprepared?"

"I had no other choice. I thought it better to die in the attempt than to give that cursed Durand the satisfaction of sweating the life out of me there in prison."

"*Sacré*, you speak of the Pelican!" The old man's sharp little eyes gleamed with hate. "It was like him to take his revenge on you when he could not reach me. In a way his cowardice is similar to that of the nephew of whom you speak."

Bernard shook his head. "I do not understand."

"Because, like the nephew, he was guilty, too," declared Papillon. "To save his own filthy hide he would not tell the truth. With the exception of myself, he was the only man in St. Laurent who knew that Molin left his post that day before he should have, and yet he was afraid to speak."

"You mean that Molin left the prison the day he was murdered before the regular change of guard?"

"Exactly. It was a trick the two of them played, that first one and then the other might visit with the foolish wife of the doctor while the old gentleman was still on duty in the prison."

"Then—then it was possible for you to have killed him after all!"

"Possible! I *did* kill him. I waited behind that screen of vines inside his gate and at exactly fifteen minutes after one o'clock I slipped that knife with which you just carved that cake between his foul ribs."

Bernard glanced uneasily at the knife in his hand and put it aside.

"I went then to the Chinaman's store," Papillon continued, "and when you came to deliver the note to Wing Tai's daughter, I called you to admire my day's catch."

"You knew that I carried a note?"

"To be sure. Was I not seated with my back to that thin-board partition—where I have sat many times before?"

"You were," Bernard agreed. "But tell me, how were you so sure I would speak for you?"

THE old man smiled. "I was sure because had you not volunteered, I would have named you anyway."

"And why did you kill Molin?"

"Because he was a swine, as you well know, and because I owe the doctor my life."

"But that is the business of a doctor—the saving of life."

"Not in Guiana. It is anywhere else, but here it is much more simple to let the patient die."

"Does the doctor know what you did for him?"

"Don't be a fool. You cannot

speak to a man regarding a flirtation of his wife."

"But there is still Durand. I cannot see that you have helped the doctor a great deal."

Papillon rubbed his withered hands and chuckled. "My task is not yet finished. And now there is also Durand's injustice to you that must be accounted for, too."

Bernard shook his head. "You need not flirt with the guillotine on my account, *mon ancien*. Give me a little food and show me the way out of this cursed jungle. That is all I ask."

"The way out! *Zut*, that is nothing. The perfect escape. I have had it for years. Any time I wish to go I have but to leave and thumb my nose at all the guards in Guiana."

"Then why are you still here?"

"Why? My good friend where else in the world are there as many beautiful and valuable butterflies as right here in this jungle? *Sacré*, in eight years here on the Maroni I have captured and classified close to a thousand species. Think of it—a thousand!"

Bernard glanced at Papillon and shrugged. The old man seemed to have suddenly gone a little mad.

"But you are right," Papillon spoke more calmly. "I am getting old. It is time I was leaving this gutter of hell. We will go together. I will make one more trip to St. Laurent to attend to that dog, Durand, and prepare the way for the two of us."

"Why not let well enough alone?" Bernard tried to reason. "Your luck might not hold next time. If you have made plans for your own escape why will they not suffice for two?"

"*Zut*, do you think it is my plan to sneak off through the jungle like

those other fools, or put to sea in a dugout to drown in the mud at Nickéry? No, not me. Wait and you will see. To-morrow I will leave for St. Laurent. In ten days I will return. You will be safe here. There is plenty of food. Rest, eat and thank Heaven that there are still men of honor in this world like old Papillon."

BERNARD counted the days. Each morning he notched the trunk of a tree at the edge of the little clearing to be sure he would not lose track. On the morning of the tenth day he carefully packed the remaining food and few articles that he thought they might need in the anticipation of a hasty departure.

A twig snapped, then the brush parted, and Papillon staggered into the clearing. He did not speak for a moment. His breath came in short gasps and there was an ugly dark blotch on one side of his blouse.

"You—you are wounded!" exclaimed Bernard. "What has happened?"

The old man eased himself to the ground and rested his back against the trunk of a tree. "The dog! The swine!" he cursed. "He was smarter than I thought."

"You mean Durand? Did he do that?"

"Yes. Durand. But it was my own fault. I was too confident. I thought he was dead. He pulled his gun and—and fired. You must make all haste. They heard the shot—and followed me."

Bernard caught his breath. "They followed you! The guards!"

"Yes. I doubt if they will come to-night. It will soon be dark. But they were not far behind. They will pick up the trail again—at daylight."

"You are right," Bernard agreed. "We must make haste."

"Not we—you," Papillon declared. "In that hollow tree you will find a bundle hanging by a cord. Go get it."

"But what of you? Do you expect me to leave you here to be dragged back to St. Laurent and the guillotine?"

"The guillotine! *Sacré*, the widow will not get my head. I have a hole in my side you could stick your fist in. Do as I say. Make haste. Get that bundle."

Bernard brought the bundle from the hollow tree and dropped it at the old man's feet.

Papillon took a small packet from beneath his blouse and held it out with a shaking hand. "These are your papers. Don't lose them. You are Gaston Leguay. Do not forget."

"Leguay! You mean Leguay, the guard? Have you killed him, too?"

"No, no, fool. Leguay is on leave. That bundle contains a uniform—shoes, a razor, everything—everything you will need to make a guard of you. In this envelope with the papers you will find eight hundred francs. Eight hundred francs—understand? It took me eight years to steal and save it, but that does not matter now."

"Eight hundred francs!" gasped Bernard. "Man, you are mad! With that much money we could buy our way out of Guiana with ease. Come, we will cross the river to the Dutch side and I will find a doctor to attend to your wound."

"*Sacré*, will you do as I say?—and not argue. I am old—rotten with fever. What is there in the world for any man who has spent twenty years in Guiana? Now listen: Follow this stream to the river. You will find a dugout there in the brush. Cross to the Dutch

side and paddle with the current until you come to Albina. Put on the uniform and hide those rags you have on. When you have shaved—all but the mustache, walk into town and rent a room at the best hotel."

"But these papers! Suppose I am asked to show them."

"If you are clever it will not be necessary. But if you must—they will pass. I once forged my own parole from the prison at St. Martin. The photograph is old and worn, you will have a mustache and Leguay did not. Tell them you just grew it—that will explain the difference. Sign his name to the papers in your own hand—that is all. The rest is up to you."

BERNARD placed the packet of papers in his pocket and picked up the bundle, but he still hesitated. The clever plans, the years of toil and saving, and all the careful preparations of Papillon were his and the cost had been but sixty days in the cells.

"A little water before you go, *mon ami*, and a cigarette."

"Here you are, *mon ancien*," Bernard spoke, and stuck a cigarette between the old fellow's lips. He struck a light then and held it to the cigarette. The light went out and he struck another. "Try again," he said. "You are not—"

Bernard dropped the match and backed away. Papillon was dead. Slowly he picked up the bundle again and went down to the little stream. An hour later, where the stream joined the dark, silent river, he found a dugout hidden in a clump of brush and taking the paddle he sent the blunt bow out into the current. In the morning he would be on the Dutch side in the little town of Albina. The rest would be up to him.

Your Handwriting Tells



Conducted
By

Shirley Spencer

If you are just starting out to find your first job; or if you are dissatisfied with your present occupation and are thinking of making a change; or if the character of your friends—as revealed in their handwriting—interests you; or if, as an employer, you realize the advantage of placing your employees, in factory or office, in positions for which they are best suited—send a specimen of the handwriting of the person concerned to Handwriting Expert, Street & Smith's Complete Stories, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., and inclose a stamped, addressed envelope. All samples submitted will be analyzed by Shirley Spencer, and her expert opinion will be given, free of charge.

The coupon, which you will find at the end of this department, must accompany each handwriting specimen which you wish to have read. If possible, write with black ink.

Your communications will be held in strict confidence. Only with your permission will individual cases be discussed in the department, either with or without illustrations. It is understood that under no circumstances will the identity of the person concerned be revealed.

Miss Spencer will not assume any responsibility for the specimens of handwriting, though every precaution will be taken to insure their return.

IN the last issue I discussed the signature of Queen Elizabeth. Opposite you have the signature of England's beloved Queen Victoria. Those who think that sex can be told by handwriting will see in this signature a good reason why writing cannot be differentiated as masculine or feminine with positive assurance. Could anything be bolder and more courageous than this signature? And this was written by a queen who ruled at a time when ladies were supposed to faint on the slightest pretext and were kept closely guarded in the home.

But no man could write a more masculine-looking signature—people are still prone to call a script



masculine that is heavy and boldly stroked. That theory does not hold. To tell the truth, I receive more individual, bold scripts penned by women than I do by men.

In Queen Victoria's signature we

see independence in the tall, swinging V, and will power, dominance, and temper in the heavily dotted i's and strongly stroked t. The letters are both angular and rounded, showing strength and force of mind, with kindness and affection.

When you look at Victoria's signature you can see the logic of graphology. Here you see magnetism, individualism, courage, force, energy, aspiration, ambition, and ideals, a big human heart, and a driving will and vigorous mind. You wouldn't expect this woman to be a negative, unsuccessful person, would you?

Look at your own signature. Does it show that you are a leader?

"Caution": Since you don't want name or initials used, I had to make up a name for you. How do you like it? Caution is the most outstanding characteristic I find in your carefully penned script. However, you are not without courage once you decide to do a thing. I'm glad you took a chance and wrote in because sometimes one does "get something for nothing" in this world!

*This accounts
advantage of their offer at th
have my hand writing analy
to be honest it is the first th
read a copy of this magazine*

You are not the money-making type exactly, but you can save. This thrifty streak will help you to make the best of your opportunities. As for occupation—you have mechanical and constructive ability. And as for the fair sex—you are a bit set in your ideas and a little slow to make friends, but if you can interest a girl long enough she will

find you loyal and very sincere. Material tastes and temper are shown, but you do try to control both.

E. D. W., Hawaii: First I'll narrow down your problem to a choice between two professions: engineering and journalism. I would not consider law if I were you.

*My gratitude would have
no bonds if you would
aid me in a solution of my
problem.*

Your uneven, angular script shows a scientific bent, and yet you have not exactly the sense of form for engineering, though you might develop this. You have imagination and that particular type of energy and variety of interests which fit in well with newspaper work. Your analytical qualities could be used here just as much as in the other work, so my advice is to study journalism. In your case I suggest that you get a small newspaper job while studying, because you will learn better through practical experience than through a scholarly course.

J. H., West Va: Perhaps you will notice that you have somewhat the same style of writing as the young man from Hawaii. So journalism would be most suitable for you, too. However, because you are a girl, it might not be easy for you to break into newspaper work. As you like children and have thought of teaching them, I suggest that you try writing stories for them, and take some training which will assist you to illustrate these stories. In that way you will be able to combine the three professions in which you are interested.

Dear Miss Spencer,

I am not in any
apt, but am trying to
my "life work" and
if you could help me
my handwriting.

You are rather nervous and not exactly poised yet. Your moods vary.

C. T. D., Iowa: I have purposely used yours and the other two writings preceding in the same issue in order to show the same type of writing with varying degrees of ability. You have more real literary ability than the other two, and so could do more original work.

My dear Shirley Spencer,

I have discovered that
work with in this kind of
your in "Complete Stories."

You have an analytical mind, critical and subtle. You are very selfish and extremely changeable. But you have real talent. You are extremely sensitive and feel every change around you acutely. By all means carry on with your ambition.

R. M. P., Ontario: I think that you are suitably placed. The butchering trade is suitable for one who has strong material tastes such as your heavy writing shows.

of my handwriting
I am a butcher by the
have worked for the
company for over three

You also have business ability. Your signature shows executive ability, so that you could soon be

in charge and then have your own business. You are quite capable of doing that.

Miss J. Y., Wash.: The circle i-dots and the graceful flowing letters of your writing all point to artistic talent.

do feel you to analyze
that kind of work to
expect it? (Question)
I have enclosed a

I suggest you study designing or interior decorating. You also would like working with perfumes and artistic novelties.

You are vivacious, pleasure-loving, and quite "airy" in your manner. Though you seem very friendly there is considerable secretiveness expressed in those tied-up letter formations. You do not tell your personal business. Your signature carries out the same feeling of gaiety and social manner in the long, curving underscore. The hooks at both ends confirm the verdict of the closely tied letters.

Many of the Canadians are forgetting to send the coin or stamp with a self-addressed envelope. Those from other foreign countries forget that their stamp is of no use when sending from here. Send International Postal Coupon for postage, please.

Handwriting Coupon for Street & Smith's Complete Stories

This coupon must accompany each specimen of handwriting which you wish read.

Name

Address



GET TOGETHER!

FICTION FASHIONS

WHENEVER two or three writers get together for a social chat, whether by pre-arrangement or a happy coincidence—Fate always waves the banner of a felicitous coincidence in the eye of an author—eventually the talk turns to the taste of the reading public. When a tired editor has spent the best part of several months trying to discover definite signs on the literary horizon that a certain type of fiction has established its popularity with the reading public, and he has come to the sad conclusion that there is no fixed fashion in

fiction, along comes one of these wise writers to tell him what the reading public wants now.

If an editor presses one of these writers for more definite data on why adventure stories are "out" and detective stories are "in," the writer fails to present any new or clinching evidence for his statement. At best, he will insist—naming four or five new fly-by-night, out-of-the-alley sensational rags—such and such magazines are "going strong," while the general adventure magazines, naming a bunch of ephemeral pseudo-adventure magazines, are "not going."

HERE is one editor who does not hesitate to dismiss all such loose talk about present taste in popular fiction as silly; who discounts the heated conclusions of these informal conferences of writers as of no consequence. Any real editor is keen to get the opinions of writers and to discuss the perennial subject of fiction with them, but no real editor is misled or overborne by the passing opinions of writers. His position is not so much that he knows more about public taste than the writer, but that his position is fixed by certain stable elements in human nature. He, the editor, may have as many lapses in taste or judgment as the writer, nor does he contend that he is immune to criticism—in fact, he invites the criticism of his readers, if he is a good editor, rather than the opinions of his writers—but he knows fashions in fiction may come and go; the style of writing may change from generation to generation and popularity is apt to be as ephemeral as the weather. But a good stout story is never out of fashion; no matter to what particular type of adventure, crime, or mystery it may belong. The story is the thing. If there is a real story, a coming together of men and women in human conflict, with a releasing of the emotions of human nature, that story will always register with discriminating readers so long as men are men.

YOU may and undoubtedly do read a number of clever fiction pieces—stories which hold your passing interest because of some clever, trick ending of the writer, but such stories will remain in your mind no longer than the tobacco in your pipe; while a story with little plot and no tricks, but

with real feeling and sincerity, because it betrays a dramatic or tragic crisis in the life of a fellow human wayfarer, will remain a permanent possession of your mind. Your editor recalls, with unabated emotion, one of the boys' stories he read twenty-five years ago. It was the story of a boy who joined a circus and left it with a little monkey as his pet. It was written by a man who held a respectable position in the consular service of the United States. He liked boys and he loved animals. He spent his working day looking after the concerns of his country, not at an informal conference table talking big about the trend in fiction or what will go with readers and editors.

He was not concerned to write a story to order. He was deeply stirred by the plight of youth in a hard situation and the compensation the boy found for his loneliness in the companionship of an unhappy little monkey. There was nothing sensational in the situation, no murder, mystery, or rackets. But a tough-minded man, who has read and digested thousands of books in the meantime, who has known life at many levels, still recalls that story with a lump in his throat.

THIS is the test—the only test of popularity, and the only gauge to apply to a story: Does it leave you feeling differently about life and people? Does the story restore your belief in the inherent decency of human nature and the worth of human life? If it does, it's a good story; if it leaves you with a feeling of disgust for your kind, a disbelief in any good but pleasure and profit, take my word for it, it is a piece of "cheese," even if it moves with the rapidity of an airplane and is filled with brawling and undefeated dare-devils.



Everybody's talking about it!



BREWED AND BOTTLED BY O'KEEFES
100% CANADIAN OWNED AND OPERATED.

SAVE BUCKINGHAM WRAPPERS FOR CHRISTMAS TOYS FOR NEEDY CHILDREN

Smoke

Buckingham

New Crop
PIPE TOBACCO

*for
Pleasure*



PACKAGES
10¢ 15¢
20¢